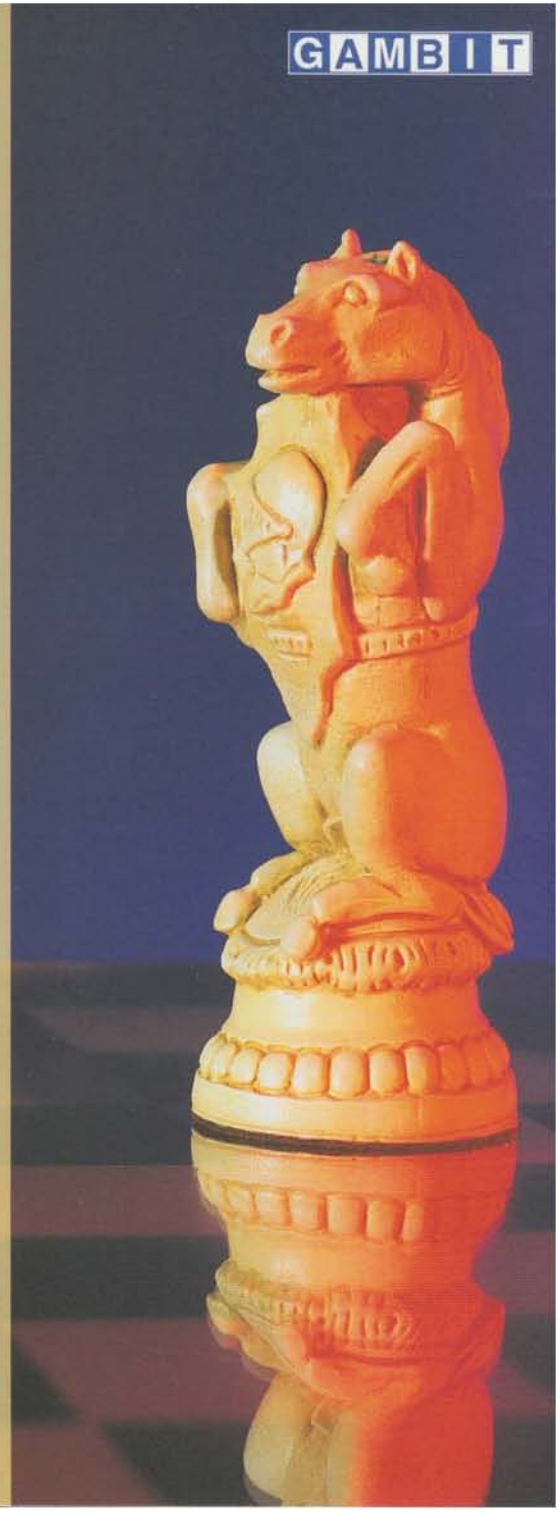
Secrets of Chess Defence

Learn how to defend and counter-attack



Mihail Marin

GAMBIT

Defence is traditionally a neglected area of chess study, but it is also one of the most important, rewarding and intriguing. Good defensive abilities earn players a great many half-points and full-points. The climax of the defence is the launching of a devastating counter-attack, a skill at which all the great chess champions have been adept.

Sometimes we need to defend against unsound attacks, and then the challenge is to parry the attack while retaining winning chances. In equal positions, both sides must judge carefully how much of their resources to devote to the attack and the counter-attack.

The main subject, though, is the case where the defender is fighting for his life, and must decide how to maximize his chances of survival. Marin considers psychological issues and explains the main options available to the defender, such as simplification, cold-blooded defence with the minimum of forces, or a positional sacrifice. In each case he discusses in detail the key issues in the resulting positions: how to defend difficult endings; how to assess threats realistically; and the prospects for counterplay that typically arise from a variety of material imbalances.

Throughout the book there are exercises for the reader, together with full solutions.

Mihail Marin is a strong grandmaster from Romania. He achieved his first major success in international chess by qualifying for the interzonals in 1987. He has won the Romanian Championship on three occasions and has played in eight Olympiads. For several years he was editor of the magazine *Chess Extrapress*.

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Symbols

+	check
++	double check
#	checkmate
!!	brilliant move
!	good move
!?	interesting move
?!	dubious move
?	bad move
??	blunder
Ch	championship
Cht	team championship
Wch	world championship
Wcht	world team championship
Ech	European championship
Echt	European team championship
ECC	European Clubs Cup
Ct	candidates event
IZ	interzonal event
Z	zonal event
OL	olympiad
jr	junior event
wom	women's event
rpd	rapidplay game
tt	team tournament
sim	game from simultaneous display
corr.	correspondence game
adv	advanced chess (man + machine)
1-0	the game ends in a win for White
½-½	the game ends in a draw
0-1	the game ends in a win for Black
(*n*)	*n*th match game
(D)	see next diagram

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Foreword

This is the first book I have written. In earlier times, irregular typing might have betrayed the author's nervousness. Nowadays, the computer hides such factors.

I shall try to explain how the book has been written and what aims I have been following.

I have a deep admiration for such classic authors as Botvinnik and Averbakh. They had a special gift for distilling many hours of work into just a few words. Besides its aesthetic value, this way of writing had also a didactic role: the reader was shown only the tip of the iceberg and was invited to uncover the rest himself.

Why, then, did I choose a completely different approach?

The main reason was that it is not so easy to follow the footsteps of such outstanding intellectuals as those mentioned. If you are not at least as good as them you risk ending up looking like a monkey that tries to imitate a human.

At the same time, I wanted to dissociate myself from a certain modern tendency. Citing a lot of games without annotations is no longer any sign of thoroughness and time-consuming research; on the contrary, it suggests a superficial approach. With those marvellous *copy* and *paste* functions, you can easily fill 200 pages in less than a week.

By giving a considerable amount of variations and verbal comments to the vast majority of the games, I have tried to convince the reader (and, possibly, myself) about the validity of the main logical discourse of each chapter.

The thorough analytical approach uncovered a surprisingly large number of errors in the previously published comments or in the games themselves. Quite often brilliant ideas were carried out in an imperfect way. This has often led to a radical reconsideration of the chapter's initial structure and, in a few regrettable cases, to the exclusion of games which have been traditionally considered as highly instructive.

I know a strong grandmaster who is working on the second edition of a best-seller without the help of a computer. In my eyes, this is a way to ensure an original, thought-provoking book. I decided not to attempt to escape wholly from the digital world, and I took advantage of most of the facilities a computer can offer. Nevertheless, when analysing a game or a position, I would usually only turn on the analysis module once I had formed a clear, human, opinion myself.

One of the most difficult tasks has been the selection of examples. There is no such button or option as 'successful defence' in the search mask provided by ChessBase. Therefore, I had to rely mostly on the information stored on an analogue support, called memory and located somewhere behind my glasses. For the most part I have chosen games by great players from all periods of chess history. There are also a significant number of my own games. This is not a consequence of my lack of modesty; I felt that I was more able to explain phenomena of a psychological and technical nature when I had experienced them myself.

I hope you will enjoy reading this book as much as I did writing it.

Mihail Marin
Bucharest, 2003

1 The Noble Art of Defence

We live in a world marked by aggression at all levels.

Throughout history, nations, tribes, and empires have tried to solve their problems, of a social, political or economic nature, by throwing stones, arrows or bombs into neighbouring territories.

At an individual level, the picture is very much the same; we tend to attribute most of our problems and miseries to external causes, connected with other people. The *mote that is in thy brother's eye* is so much easier to notice than *the beam that is in thine own eye*; therefore, what should in principle be a noble contest between people, often degenerates into jungle-like fights.

Chess is only an abstract reflection of the real world and the notions of attack and defence don't imply any moral nuances. They are nothing other than two opposing fighting methods which should be employed in accordance with the necessities. However, chess is played by humans, which explains the subjective judgement of these complementary aspects of the game.

In older times, the notion of attack was associated with such epithets as courageous or brilliant, while a player with a solid, defensive style was likely to be considered a coward. Chess was regarded just as another form of medieval duel, with all the implicit moral norms. Refusing to pick up a gauntlet thrown down by the opponent was not in the players' habit.

In the following diagram, Black has obvious compensation for the small material deficit. To continue the attack, he must annihilate White's centre.

B

Hamppe – Steinitz
Vienna 1859

10...♗xf3+

Steinitz chose the e5-pawn as a target; he might have done this because he managed to calculate better the consequences of the variation played in the game.

At a more mature age, he would have probably understood that the d4-pawn was much more important and would have given more attention to the move 10...♖xd4!!. After this spectacular blow, White's position wouldn't have resisted for too long: 11 cxd4 ♘xd4+ 12 ♔e3 (or 12 ♔d3 ♗f5+ 13 ♔c3 ♘xf3 when 14 ♕xf3? is impossible because of 14...♕b4#) 12...♘xf3 (this is even better than 12...♗xf3 13 gxf3 ♗c5, as suggested by Neishtadt) 13 gxf3 ♗c5+ 14 ♔e2 (or 14 ♔d3 ♗f5+ mating on the next move; 14 ♔e4 also allows a nice mate, by 14...♗f5+ 15 ♔xf5 g6#) 14...♕f2+ 15 ♔d3 ♕d4+ 16 ♔e2 ♕e4+! followed by mate.

11 gxf3 ♘xe5

This sacrifice is entirely correct, but has one major drawback: White is not forced to accept it!

12 dxe5? *(D)*

This was the move Steinitz was expecting, of course. The spirit of the age didn't suggest to either of the players to consider the calm move 12 ♕e1!, which forces the exchange of queens. In the endgame, White's bishop-pair and centralized king would compensate for his shattered pawn-structure. As we shall see, the strength of the king in the centre was to become a central point in Steinitz's system of thinking.

After the acceptance of the sacrifice, it is interesting to follow the final attack. It is remarkable

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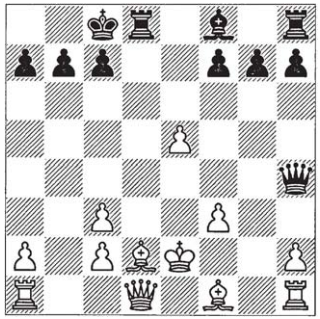
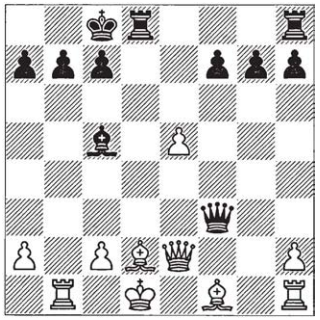


how well calculated everything was; a modern grandmaster couldn't have done it better.

12...♗c5! 13 ♕e1 ♕c4+ 14 ♔d1 ♕xc3 15 ♖b1 ♕xf3+ 16 ♕e2 *(D)*

Steinitz might have regretted that he was not given the possibility of demonstrating the main line of his combination: 16 ♗e2 ♖xd2+! 17 ♔xd2 ♕e3+ 18 ♔d1 ♖d8+ 19 ♗d3 ♖xd3+! 20 cxd3 ♕xd3+ 21 ♔c1 ♗a3+ 22 ♖b2 ♕b5 23 ♕d2 ♕c6+ reaching a winning queen ending.

B



16...♖xd2+ 17 ♔xd2 ♖d8+ 18 ♔c1

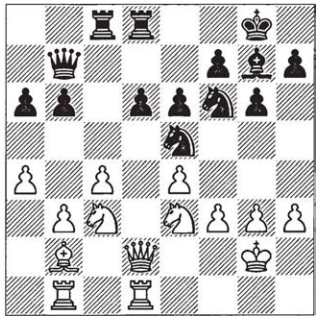
Against 18 ♕d3 the spectacular 18...♗b4+! is best, in order to enable ...♕xh1 after...♖xd3.

18...♗a3+ 19 ♖b2 ♕c3 20 ♗h3+ ♔b8 21 ♕b5 ♕d2+ 22 ♔b1 ♕d1+ 23 ♖xd1 ♖xd1# (0-1)

Paradoxically, changes in attitudes during the 20th century were reflected in a positive way in chess. People became awfully pragmatic in everyday life, abandoning any heroic or utopian dreams; in chess this helped the players to judge positions from a more objective point of view.

It is interesting to follow how differently the defending side reacted in a similar situation to that from the previous game, almost one and a half centuries later.

B



Skembris – Marin
Moscow OL 1994

White has problems defending all his weaknesses against Black's perfectly coordinated army.

21...b5!!

The completely unexpected start of a correct attack. The idea is to undermine the f3- and e4-squares.

22 axb5 axb5 23 ♘xb5

After 23 cxb5 Black has to eliminate the knight with 23...♖xc3!; for instance, 24 ♗xc3 (better than 24 ♕xc3 ♘xe4 25 fxe4 ♕xe4+ with a strong attack) 24...♘xe4 (against my initial intention 24...♘xf3 White has 25 ♕c2 with the idea of answering 25...♘xe4 with 26 ♗xg7 followed by ♕c6) 25 fxe4 ♕xe4+ 26 ♔f2 ♕f3+ and White is unable to escape the perpetual check:

a) 27 ♔g1?! ♕xg3+ 28 ♔f1 (after 28 ♔h1 ♕xh3+ White has to leave the knight undefended with 29 ♕h2) 28...♕xh3+ and now the over-ambitious 29 ♘g2? leads to an unexpected disaster after 29...♘f3! 30 ♕e3 ♖c8!! 31 ♗xg7 ♖c2 when, in order to avoid the mate, White will lose material.

b) Safer is 27 ♔e1 ♕h1+, when the king should accept the repetition since 28 ♘f1?? loses the queen to 28...♘f3+.

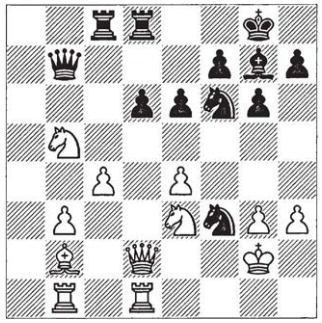
After the text-move, Black has two possible knight sacrifices. I calculated for a long time the consequences of both moves and assumed that after 23...♘xe4 24 fxe4 the attack would be much stronger than after 23...♘xf3 24 ♔xf3.

The only thing I missed was that White was not forced to accept the former sacrifice, while after 23...♘xf3 White's pawn-structure is irreparably damaged, so it would be of less importance if he accepted the offering or not!

23...♘xe4?

Here are some lines to demonstrate the correctness of the other sacrifice. 23...♘xf3! *(D)* and then:

W



a) 24 ♔xf3 ♘xe4 25 ♕g2 (relatively best; Black has good winning chances after 25 ♕e1 ♘g5++ 26 ♔e2 ♕f3+ 27 ♔d3 d5; for example, 28 cxd5?? ♖xd5+) 25...♘c3+ 26 ♔f2 ♘xd1+ 27 ♘xd1 d5 28 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 and Black's rook and pawn are definitely stronger than two disconnected knights, especially given that the white king is very exposed.

b) 24 ♘xd6! ♖xd6! (in my initial notes, published, for instance, in *Informator*, I claimed an advantage for Black after 24...♕c6 but the calm 25 ♕f2 leaves the black army slightly discoordinated) 25 ♕xd6 ♘xe4 26 ♕d7 (White has to attack the black queen in order to avoid disaster along the long diagonal) 26...♘e1+!. With this elegant move, Black underlines that not only his pieces are hanging. As strange as it might seem, the king has no way to escape, and White has to accept a draw by perpetual check:

b1) 27 ♔f1? ♘xg3+ 28 ♔xe1 ♕h1+ 29 ♔d2 ♕h2+ 30 ♔c1 ♘e2+ 31 ♔c2 ♘d4+ 32 ♔c3 ♘c6+ 33 ♔d3 ♖d8 winning the queen.

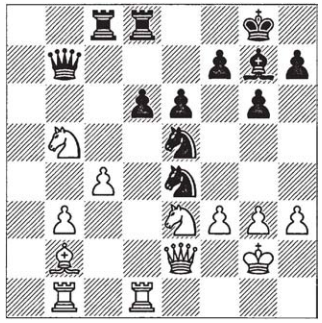
b2) 27 ♔h1? ♘xg3+ 28 ♔h2 ♕h1+ 29 ♔xg3 ♕g1+ with a winning attack.

b3) 27 ♔g1 ♘f3+ 28 ♔g2 (28 ♔h1 has the important drawback of leaving the f3-knight unattacked, thus allowing a quiet move like 28...♕b8 with dangerous threats, while 28 ♔f1 loses material to 28...♕xd7 29 ♖xd7 ♘fd2+) 28...♘e1+ with a draw.

24 ♕e2! *(D)*

Skembris played this without any hesitation; the alternative would have been comfortable for Black: 24 fxe4 ♕xe4+ 25 ♔f1 ♕h1+ (during the game we both calculated 25...♗h6? assuming that Black has a winning attack, but White can reply 26 ♕g2! and if 26...♕xe3 then 27 ♗c1) 26 ♔f2 ♕f3+ 27 ♔e1 (better than 27 ♔g1 ♕xg3+ 28 ♔f1 ♕xh3+, when Black has enough material for the piece and a continuing initiative) and now, besides giving perpetual check, Black can try to play on in a rather unclear position with 27...♕xg3+ 28 ♕f2 ♕xh3.

B



24...♘c5

Suddenly, the knights are very unstable in the centre. c5 is not really the best square on the board, but 24...♘g5 loses to 25 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 26 h4 and the knight is trapped.

25 ♗xe5!

Another precise move. 25 ♘xd6?! ♖xd6 26 ♖xd6 ♕xb3 27 ♖dd1 ♕a4 (or 27...♕a2) offers Black some chances of a draw.

25...♗xe5 26 ♘g4 ♖a8 27 b4 ♘a4 28 ♘xe5 dxe5 29 ♕xe5

By this stage, White is completely winning. Luckily enough, I managed to draw this position, but I was nevertheless highly disappointed from a creative point of view.

There was a long way between these two moments; radical changes of mentality take a lot of time. I shall try, however, to mark the turning point regarding the general opinion about the art of defence.

And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.
(MARK 1; 22)

I have deliberately chosen the first example of this introductory chapter from Steinitz's practice. We had the occasion to follow the future world champion in a diametrically opposed posture to that officially recorded by history.

Steinitz had learned to play chess in Vienna and his style was very much like that of his Austrian colleagues: sharp, combinative, attacking.

In 1866 he achieved his first major success, by winning 8-6 a match against Adolf Anderssen, the player who unofficially held the world supremacy after his triumph in London 1851. Steinitz was delighted by the result, of course, but when he took a closer look at the games themselves, he drew the disappointing conclusion that many of them were decided not so much by the winner's brilliancy, as by the mistakes committed in defence by the opponent. This unpleasant feeling was only a warning signal; you don't implement major changes of style after a great success.

One year later, Steinitz finished third in the international tournament held in Paris. This would have been considered an honourable result for any other player, but not for the man who had defeated Anderssen. Therefore Steinitz started to devote a lot of analytical and philosophical thinking to chess. The tournament in Paris must have acted in the same way as St Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, so radical was the change in Steinitz's style of play. He didn't abandon the pure combinative style because he was not suited for it, but because he discovered there was something better.

With the passage of the years, he elaborated a system of rules and theories which were meant to serve as guidelines for every player; this was something that the chess world had never seen before. I shall not enumerate all these rules here, since the most important of them serve as starting points for several chapters of this book.

For the first time the notion of strategy started to get contours; defence started being described as a noble art and for the first time it was associated with wisdom. Steinitz wrote: "Generally speaking, an attack only has chances to succeed if the opponent's position has already been weakened." By choosing passive but solid systems of development, he invited his opponents to weaken their positions in a fever to attack. After repelling the offensive wave, Steinitz displayed merciless technique to exploit all these positional concessions.

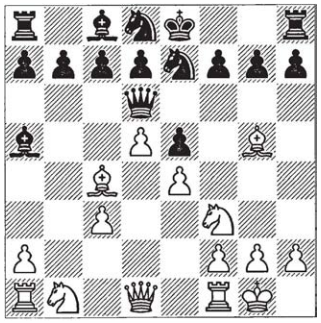
Steinitz gladly accepted any gambit, relying on his defensive skills. Sometimes he allowed his pieces to be pushed back in order to avoid pawn weaknesses, which, according to his views, would have been a bigger concession.

Look how different is Steinitz's play in the next example, compared to the game against Hamppe!

Chigorin – Steinitz
Havana Wch (9) 1889

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 b4 ♗xb4 5 c3 ♗a5 6 0-0 ♕f6 7 d4 ♘ge7 8 ♗g5 ♕d6 9 d5 ♘d8 *(D)*

W



In this position, Steinitz's pieces don't create too favourable an impression. However, he repeatedly stated in his articles that a knight such as the one on d8 is perfectly well developed. He was also convinced that, in most cases, the king is strong enough to take care of itself.

10 ♕a4 b6 11 ♘a3 a6 12 ♗b3?!

In the next game where Chigorin had the white pieces, the more precise 12 ♗d3! was played, when 12...♗xc3 13 ♖ab1 left White with a strong attack.

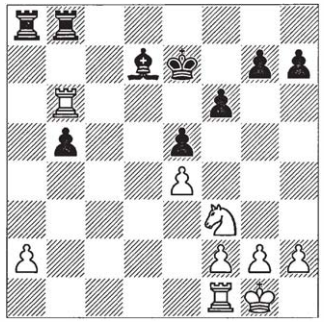
12...♗xc3 13 ♖ac1 ♕b4

Once the queens are exchanged, Black's position becomes entirely safe, of course.

14 ♘b5!? ♕xb5 15 ♕xb5 axb5 16 ♖xc3 c5 17 dxc6 ♘dxc6 18 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 19 ♗d5 f6 20 ♗xc6 dxc6 21 ♖xc6 ♗d7 22 ♖xb6 ♖hb8!? *(D)*

Returning the material in order to get some other advantages; this was one of Steinitz's favourite operations. After the greedy 22...♖xa2 White would obtain some compensation with 23 ♖b7 planning ♖d1 or ♖b1. After the game continuation, the position becomes technical; Black's better centralized king and the long-range bishop ensure him an advantage.

W



23 ♖xb8 ♖xb8 24 ♖b1 ♗c6 25 ♖e1

Suddenly, White cannot avoid the loss of a pawn. 25 ♘d2 is of little help due to 25...♖d8 26 ♖b2 ♗xe4!.

25...♖a8 26 ♖e2 ♖a4 27 ♖b2 ♖xe4

and Black won.

Chigorin was a totally opposed chess personality to Steinitz. He was an unconditioned devotee of the combinative school. These two outstanding players had an intense rivalry of principles for many years, which featured in two world championship matches, lively polemics in newspapers and chess magazines and thematic games played by telegraph.

The Evans Gambit was a major point of controversy between Steinitz and Chigorin, but from the modern point of view the whole discussion is pointless: the gambit is entirely correct, but doesn't offer chances for a concrete advantage. This was also underlined by the fluctuating results of this opening in their two matches.

In my opinion, the following game, which, curiously, has escaped the attention of the annotators so far, is a much better illustration of the triumph of the Steinitzian strategy against the slightly one-sided style of his opponent.

Chigorin – Steinitz
Havana Wch (11) 1892

1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 d6

This variation of the Ruy Lopez is known to chess theory as the Steinitz Variation. Black opts for a solid pawn-structure; by overprotecting the e5-pawn he avoids the Exchange Variation structure, which arises if ♗xc6 is met by ...dxc6.

4 ♘c3 ♗d7

Although ♗xc6 was not such a threat any more, given that ...bxc6 is now more feasible, Steinitz's hurry to prevent his pawns from being doubled is quite revealing.

5 d4 ♘ge7

Reinforcing the e5-square.

6 ♗g5 *(D)*

B

From Chigorin's point of view, this must have been a dream position. With every move he attacks or pins an enemy piece, while the general sensation is that his army is much more active than Black's.

6...f6

This looks like a horrible concession, because it weakens a light diagonal and obstructs a dark one. However, Steinitz must have been happy that he was given the possibility of consolidating his central position without loss of time.

7 ♗e3 ♘g6 8 ♕d2 a6 9 ♗a4 b5 10 ♗b3

For a player with an attacking style from that epoch, a bishop placed on this diagonal must have been the favourite piece. Many games from positions like this were decided by a blow against f7. And here, the weakness is already there, without any need for a sacrifice.

10...♘a5

It might seem that Black plans to exchange this bishop. However, Steinitz had some other plans with this knight. He understood that ...♘xb3, axb3 would in a sense improve White's structure in view of a further ♘e2 and c4, and by opening the a-file for the rook.

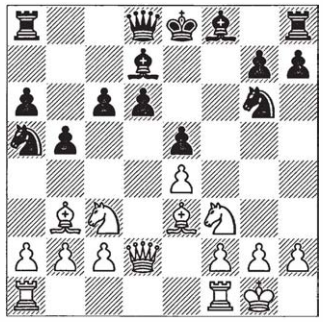
11 0-0 c6

Giving the pawn-structure even more elasticity and depriving White's minor pieces of the important d5-square.

12 dxe5

Chigorin, not interested in a slow battle, decides to open the play.

12...fxe5 *(D)*



This certainly looks risky, but Steinitz is guided by the principle that pawns should move towards the centre if allowed.

13 ♗g5

This is a start of a new series of attacking moves. Chigorin must have thought that he was close to victory.

13...♗e7 14 ♖fd1

By choosing this rook, he was probably still hoping that Black would play ...♘xb3. Instead, 14 ♖ad1 comes into consideration.

14...♘b7

This was the point behind the knight manoeuvre: Black has safely defended his backward pawn.

15 ♗xe7

Chigorin was concerned about creating concrete threats as soon as possible, but with this exchange he only helps Black to develop. Instead, he should have opened a second front by 15 a4, when Black would have had bigger problems holding his position together.

15...♕xe7 16 ♘g5

This was White's idea: the threat of ♘f7xd6 looks very dangerous now. Chigorin would have been very surprised if somebody had told him at this moment that this knight was going to become vulnerable just a few moves later.

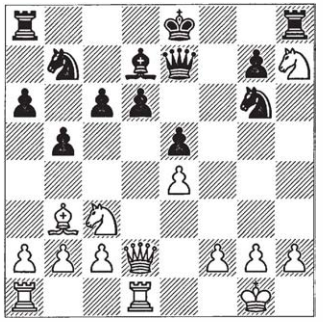
16...♖f8!

Steinitz gladly sacrifices the h7-pawn in order to keep his central formation intact.

17 ♘xh7

There was already no way back for White: Black was threatening 17...h6 and if 18 ♘f3 then 18...♗g4.

17...♖h8 *(D)*



18 ♕g5

Confronted with something familiar, Chigorin's talent finally manifests itself. The Russian champion understood that Black can use the h-file for an attack after 18 ♘g5 0-0-0! 19 g3 (or 19 ♘f7 ♕h4 planning ...♘f4 and/or ...♗xh3 and the white king is in danger) 19...♖df8!. Another calm move, cutting off all the knight's

retreats. After, for instance, 20 f3 Black obtains dangerous threats with 20...♖h5 21 h4 ♘xh4! 22 gxh4 ♖xh4 planning ...♖fh8 or ...♖hf4.

Chigorin would have liked to get such an attacking position himself and there is little wonder that he avoided it as White. However, if he had foreseen the strategic problems awaiting him in the endgame, he might have played precisely this way...

18...♘f4!

Forcing the next exchange, which allows Black to finish his development.

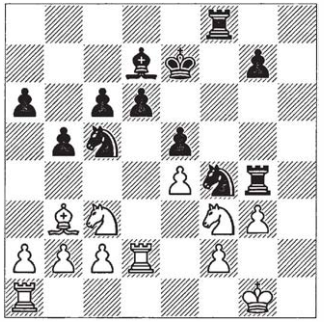
19 ♕xe7+ ♔xe7

This is a perfect example of Steinitz's theory that the king is a strong piece in the middle of the board. The d6-pawn is safely defended now, which will later enable the knight to be transferred to a more active position.

20 ♘g5 ♖h5 21 h4

As usually happens in case of a superior strategy, things work out perfectly tactically for Black. White has to return the pawn in order to save the knight. 21 ♘f3 is worse, because of 21...♗g4 followed by ...♗xf3 and ...♖ah8 with an enormous advantage.

21...♖xh4 22 g3 ♖g4 23 ♘f3 ♖f8 24 ♖d2 ♘c5 *(D)*



The triumph of Black's strategy. All White's minor pieces, which at an earlier stage created an impression of strength and activity, are very passive now, restricted by the black pawns. True, the a2-g8 diagonal is still open, but there is nothing left to attack on it. On the other hand, the black pieces occupy excellent positions. Steinitz went on to win without any major problems.

25 ♘h2 ♖g6 26 ♖e1 ♘h3+ 27 ♔g2 ♘g5 28 ♖de2 ♖h6 29 ♖e3 ♖fh8 30 ♘f1 ♗h3+ 31 ♔g1 ♗g4 32 ♔g2 b4

Like in the best Sicilian tradition, this move is made only at a moment when it leads to a concrete advantage.

33 f4

Desperation. In case of 33 ♘a4 Black wins the e-pawn without allowing real counterplay: 33...♘cxe4 34 f4 (what else? If 34 ♖xe4 then 34...♗f3+ leads to mate) 34...♗h3+ 35 ♔g1 ♗xf1 36 ♔xf1 ♖h2! and the white king comes under decisive attack; for instance, 37 ♖xe4 (White has to eliminate one of the knights, but 37 fxg5 allows an elegant mate: 37...♘d2+ 38 ♔g1 ♖h1+ 39 ♔f2 ♖8h2#) 37...♖h1+ 38 ♔f2 ♖8h2+ with huge material gains.

Steinitz probably wouldn't have had problems in finding these moves; his previous experience as a young attacking player would have helped him. In fact, the game featured a similar picture.

33...♗h3+ 34 ♔f2 ♖f6 35 ♘e2 ♘gxe4+ 36 ♔g1 ♗xf1 37 fxe5 dxe5 38 ♖xf1 ♖fh6 39 ♖f7+

Finally, the bishop is useful for something, but this is a pale consolation.

39...♔d6 40 ♖xg7 ♖h1+ 41 ♔g2 ♘d2

A strong quiet move. Remarkably, this coincides with *Junior*'s suggestion.

42 ♖g6+ ♔c7 43 g4 ♖8h2+ 44 ♔g3 ♘f1+ 45 ♔f3 ♖h3+ 0-1

Chigorin resigned in view of the major material losses.

Most modern authors tend to ignore (or publicly deny) the instructional value of old games. Their main argument is that not even a club player would nowadays commit such naïve mistakes as the old masters. Such an opinion is usually generated by an insufficient knowledge of the inheritance left to us by the great masters of the past. It is much easier to criticize something that you don't know, of course, and the method is not new, either: La Fontaine's fox discovered it a long time ago by carefully studying the unreachable grapes.

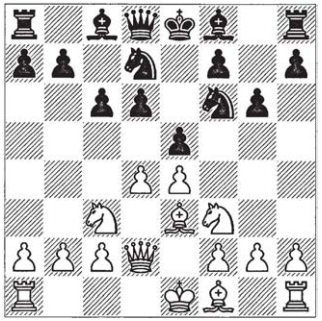
In the previous game, Chigorin's mistakes were not obvious at all. It was only his general approach that was too straightforward, but this was a matter of style. Modern grandmasters are

not immune to such mistakes either. The player behind the white pieces from the next game became a candidates finalist almost one century after Chigorin's first challenge for the world title.

A. Sokolov – Marin
Bled OL 2002

1 e4 d6 2 d4 ♘f6 3 ♘c3 g6 4 ♗e3 c6 5 ♕d2 ♘bd7 6 ♘f3 e5 *(D)*

W



7 ♖d1!

This is a new move, at least according to my experience. Most players try to launch an attack with kings castled on opposite sides, but this idea is likely to fail. Here is a strategic catastrophe for White: 7 0-0-0 ♕e7 8 dxe5 dxe5 9 ♗c4 ♗g7 (9...b5 is premature in view of 10 ♗xb5 cxb5 11 ♘xb5 with a decisive attack) 10 ♗h6 (for attacking purposes, this seems to be the right moment for this move, but meanwhile Black has obtained good control of the dark squares) 10...0-0 11 a4 (preventing further expansion with ...b5, ...a5, etc.) 11...♘c5 12 h4 ♗g4 (12...♘fxe4!? seems to be possible, but I had more static plans) 13 ♕g5 ♖ae8 14 ♖de1 ♗xf3 15 gxf3 ♘h5 16 ♖eg1 ♕f6 17 ♕xf6 ♗xh6+ 18 ♕g5 ♗xg5+ 19 ♖xg5 a5 gave Black complete domination on the dark squares on both wings in Miljanić-Marin, Bucharest 2000. It's true that I relaxed in my opponent's time-trouble (he had just 20 seconds left, without any increment!) and allowed an almost winning exchange sacrifice; fortunately, he had no time left to reach the control...

Sokolov's move is more precise. In view of White's pin along the d-file, Black is forced to determine the position of his queen, while the white king is not transferred to the dangerous wing.

7...♕e7

7...♕c7 would be risky, since White could reconsider the idea of a kingside attack.

8 ♗e2

Another strong and unexpected move. The typical square for the bishop in this line is d3, but Sokolov keeps the d-file open, in order to create the potential threats d5 and dxe5 followed by ♕d6.

8...♗g7 9 0-0 0-0

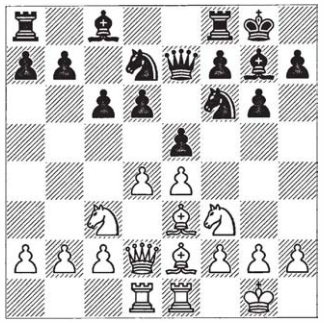
The strategically desirable 9...b5 is not recommendable with the king still in the centre: 10 d5! b4 11 dxc6 bxc3 12 cxd7+ (the trick is that this *zwischenzug* is with check) 12...♗xd7 13 ♕xc3 ♘xe4 14 ♕b4 and Black has problems.

10 ♖fe1 *(D)*

This move finally crushes Black's hope to get an easy game after an exchange on e5.

The natural 10 a4 allows Black to free himself with 10...exd4 11 ♗xd4 ♘xe4 12 ♘xe4 ♕xe4 13 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 and because of his loose pawns and his hanging bishop, White cannot increase the pressure.

B



10...♖e8

I had a tough time at this moment. White has already finished his mobilization, while for Black it is rather difficult to continue developing his pieces. My main hope relied on the closed character of the position. By prophylactically defending the queen I tried to make ...b5 work.

Exchanges in the centre are not so appealing now, but Black's main problem is that the thematic 10...b5 seems premature, in view of his poor development: 11 dxe5 dxe5 12 ♕d6! ♕xd6 13 ♖xd6 ♗b7 (13...b4 14 ♘a4 ♘xe4 15 ♖xc6 also looks good for White, whose minor pieces are controlling important squares on the underdeveloped black queenside) 14 ♖ed1 ♘b6 (14...♖ad8 is impossible in view of 15 ♘xe5) 15 ♗c5!? ♖fe8 (timidly creating the threat of ...♗f8, because the c5-bishop would be hanging) 16 b4! intending a4, in order to get the c4-square for the bishop (the immediate 16 a4 is premature due to 16...♘xa4 17 ♘xa4 ♘xe4!).

11 ♗c4?!

This is the first attacking move in this game and at the same time an inaccuracy that lets White's advantage slip away. It is also typical for Sokolov's style of play. I had previously played three games against him: a normal, a rapid and a blitz game. The score was no reason for enthusiasm: Sokolov had won every time! But on the other hand, I had learned something for him. In all cases, he exchanged two pieces for a stronger one, although this meant a slight material deficit. In the blitz game (which was also a Pirc, but was unrecorded) he sacrificed two pieces for a rook and mercilessly took advantage of my lack of coordination.

Sokolov had also tried this kind of operation in his match against Karpov, but without too much success.

As soon as I saw the bishop come to c4, I understood that ♘g5xf7 was 'unavoidable'. This helped me to chart a path through the jungle of variations.

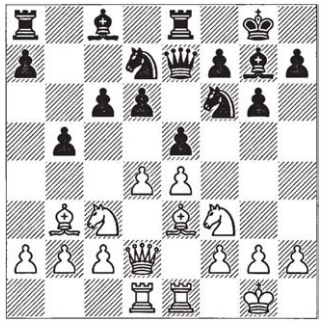
Objectively speaking (and strong players are supposed to be objective in the first place and only then follow their tastes) 11 a4 is much stronger, crowning White's simple and, at the same time, original strategy so far.

I planned the strange-looking 11...♕f8!? (11...♘g4 12 ♗g5 f6 13 ♗h4 ♘h6 didn't inspire too much confidence), when 12 d5! is the best way to keep the tension, since the e4-pawn is hanging. Black should then keep the position closed with 12...c5 (12...cxd5 13 ♘xd5! ♘xe4 14 ♕b4 followed by ♘c7 is good for White). The position has changed its character; if he had had the move 1 d4 in his repertoire as well, Sokolov wouldn't have been afraid of playing a King's Indian type of position. It's true that White's pieces look a bit congested now; the knights have no easy access to c4, but the queen retreat 13 ♕c1, symmetrical to Black's 11th move (but not 13 ♘b5 ♘xe4 14 ♕d3 ♘ef6 threatening ...e4), might keep a more pleasant position for White; for example: 13...♘g4 14 ♗d2 a6 (14...♗h6? 15 ♗xh6 ♘xh6 16 ♘b5 and Black cannot safely defend the squares d6, c7 and h6) 15 h3 followed by ♗e3 and ♘d2-c4.

The similarity with the previous game is accentuated by the fact that the omission of the move a4 at the right moment for the sake of an 'active' move with a minor piece, targeting the f7-square (15 ♗xe7 followed by 16 ♘g5 in that case), was the main reason for White's further problems.

11...b5 12 ♗b3 *(D)*

B



12...a5

It was hard to refrain from connecting the rooks (in fact, I never got the chance to do that in this game) but I noticed that after the natural 12...♗b7 13 ♘g5 ♖f8 14 dxe5 dxe5 15 ♕d6 ♕xd6 16 ♖xd6 the desirable move 16...♖ae8 (intending ...♖e7) is not possible, because the a7-pawn is hanging. By creating the threat of winning a piece, Black removes the pawn from its vulnerable position.

An experienced Romanian trainer, Mircea Pavlov, once asked me: "Do you think that pawn moves in the opening can also be considered as developing moves?" I looked at the position he had in front of him: it was a Sozin Attack, where White had developed almost all his minor pieces, while Black had played mainly with his pawns (...c5, ...cxd4, ...d6, ...a6, ...b5-b4, etc.). Despite my sincere efforts I couldn't prove any forced win for White and I made a

statement which I considered to be very wise: "Well, since Tal is dead, people think they can play however they want in the opening". But at the back of my mind, I understood that Pavlov might have been right. Years later, after starting playing the Pirc, this feeling became stronger and stronger...

13 ♘g5

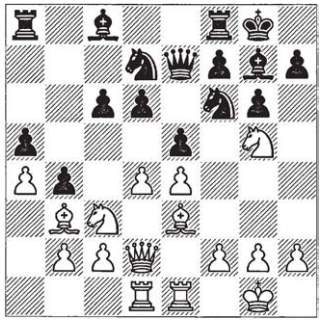
Of course, I expected that! But just as in Chigorin's case, the pressure against f7 fails to bring the desired effect.

13...♖f8 14 a4?!

Sokolov had spent a considerable amount of time so far and he played this last move rather quickly. Had he looked at the position more carefully, he might have understood that his advantage had vanished and would have tried something less obliging. It's true that after 14 a3 ♗b7 Black looks to be OK. 14 d5 b4 15 dxc6 bxc3 gives White the possibility of sacrificing a piece in several ways, but it looks like Black should be able to defend.

14...b4 *(D)*

W



15 ♘b1

White's plan is clear: sacrifice on f7, then exchange queens on d6 in order to free a route for the knight to c4 and take advantage of his better development. It all sounds very nice, but it just doesn't work. The knight wouldn't have had too many prospects on e2, but on b1 it simply looks awful.

15...♘g4

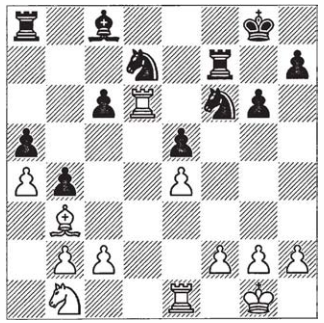
Black has to refrain from 15...h6?! which would give White a material advantage after 16 ♘xf7 ♖xf7 17 ♗xf7+ followed by 18 ♗xh6.

16 ♘xf7?!

Another player would have probably chosen the modest 16 ♘f3, after which White might still be OK, although Black's game is very pleasant; for instance: 16...♘xe3 17 ♕xe3 ♗b7 18 ♘bd2 exd4 19 ♘xd4 ♘c5 (19...c5?! gives up too many light squares: 20 ♘b5 ♗c6 {or 20...♗xb2 21 ♘c4 with light-square domination} 21 c3!? and the b3-bishop looks stronger than the g7-bishop) 20 ♘c4 ♖fe8 21 f3 ♕c7 planning ...d5, ...♗a6 or ...♘xb3 followed by ...c5, depending on White's reaction.

16...♖xf7 17 ♗g5 ♗f6 18 ♗xf6 ♘gxf6 19 dxe5 dxe5 20 ♕d6 ♕xd6 21 ♖xd6 *(D)*

B



21...♘e8 22 ♖xc6 ♗b7 23 ♗xf7+ ♔xf7

White's tactical operation has helped Black's king to centralize (compare with 19 ♕xe7+ ♔xe7 from the previous game). This will soon have a decisive influence.

24 ♖c4 *(D)*

B

White has executed his plan, but suddenly Black's pieces prove very well coordinated:

24...♘d6 25 ♖c7 ♔e7

The rook is trapped now and the game is basically over.

26 ♘d2 ♔d8

and Black went on to win.

Steinitz's contemporaries didn't understand him very well, but they had to accept the factual evidence. Using the methods of the 'new school' he managed to hold the official supremacy for eight years marked by participation in tournaments, world championship matches and his activities as a chess annotator.

Steinitz exaggerated in many respects, but his merits as a chess thinker are indisputable. One of his greatest discoveries of a general character was that chess is a logical game. If the position on the board is equal at some moment, then, with accurate play from both sides, it should remain equal for the rest of the game. Only its character might change, for instance from sharp to quiet or from the middlegame to the endgame. A successful attack can be launched only following a mistake by the opponent, unbalancing the position. At the same time, a bad position needs a lot of patient defence so as to reach equality if the attacker makes an inaccuracy.

Throughout the whole book I have constantly taken these ideas into account. This is why I have usually given a detailed evaluation of the starting position of each game fragment.

Defence is possible in:

a) worse positions (the most common situation, which doesn't require any special explanation);

b) equal positions (in order to keep the balance);

c) better positions (parrying premature attacks or destroying the opponent's temporary initiative in a strategically favourable position).

The defensive arsenal in chess is quite rich; many examples from this book present more than one characteristic element. This is why the division into chapters has been, to a certain extent, arbitrary. I could have arranged the material according to situations 'a', 'b' and 'c' as listed above. As it stands, examples on such themes as identifying the main problem of the position, psychological blackmail or neutralizing an advantage in development are spread over the whole book.

For the limited human powers, chess is inexhaustible. It would be virtually impossible to write a complete encyclopedia of chess defence.

Instead, I invite you to uncover together some secrets of this noble art...

2 Economy of Resources in Defence

Encouraged by the obvious truth that chess is a logical game, players and theoreticians have been trying, even from the older times, to find mathematical models for their favourite game. Tarrasch, for instance, stated that it should be possible to evaluate a position resulting from the opening by simply counting the tempi needed by the pieces to get to their actual squares from their original ones. Needless to say, practice didn't always sustain this point of view.

In the same epoch, Chéron formulated his famous 'rule of 5' for a certain type of ♖+♙ vs ♖ endgame, but, on the basis of the numerous exceptions he found, Grigoriev recommended the reader to try to understand the typical ideas behind the position rather than count files and ranks.

How many pieces does the attacker need in order to succeed? And how much of his army should the defender use if he is to survive? For those trying to establish a mathematical model for chess, the following two examples are rather deceptive:

W

Marin – Inkiov
Haifa Echt 1989

White has a solid space advantage and his development also looks better. What could he have to fear?

11 ♘c2?! d6 12 ♖e1??

Now, although his queenside is still undeveloped, Black could have played a winning combination, which I saw right after moving my rook:

12...♗xf3!!

The game actually continued 12...♘d7?? 13 e4 f4 14 h4 ♘f7 15 ♗xf4 ♕xh4 16 ♕d2 and, still under shock, I offered a draw, which was accepted.

13 gxf3 ♘h3+ 14 ♔f1

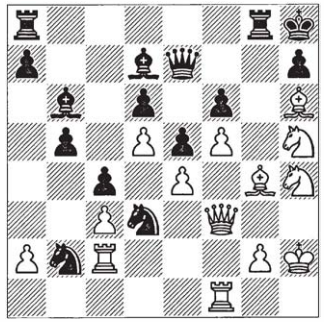
If 14 ♔h1 then 14...♘f2+ winning the queen; or 14 ♔g2 ♕g5+ 15 ♔xh3 ♖f6 mating.

14...♕g5 15 ♕d2 ♕g1+ 16 ♔e2 ♕g2+ 17 ♔d1 ♘f2+ 18 ♔e2 ♘e4+

Black wins the queen. How could this happen? The answer is that the white pieces were placed rather chaotically, lacking any logical coordination; instead of offering to their king an effective defence, they stood in his way, creating a sort of a cage around him.

The following diagram presents the other extreme situation.

B



Lasker – Steinitz
Moscow Wch (8) 1896

White has concentrated all his minor pieces against the apparently insufficiently defended black kingside. He only needs to move his queen to h3 to create the strong threat of ♘g6+ (which would allow the f1-rook to be included in the attack as well). Black has made important achievements on the other wing, but his knights seem to be of little help for defensive purposes.

31...♗e8!

With this modest-looking move, placing the g6-square under control, Black manages to parry all the threats. At the same time, the d7-square is cleared for the b2-knight in order to overprotect f6. As incredible as it might seem, White will not be able to use these three tempi (...♘a4-c5-d7) to build up a winning attack.

32 ♕h3

The h-file is almost entirely occupied by white pieces.

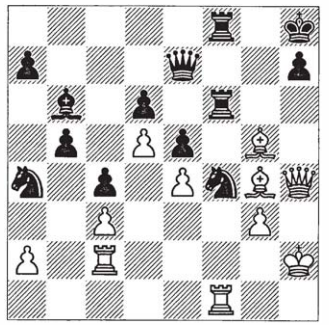
32...♘a4!

The knight starts its journey back, at the same time freeing its colleague to make a possible jump to f4, which in certain cases would reduce White's attacking potential.

33 ♗f3

This is already a sign of retreat. Lasker must have been very disappointed by the fact that Black's position resists rather well after 33 ♘g6+ ♗xg6! (White's attack would succeed in case of the greedy 33...hxg6? 34 ♘xf6! {threatening ♗f8+} 34...♖g7 35 ♗xg7+ ♔xg7 36 ♕h7+ ♔xf6 37 fxg6+ ♘f4 38 ♕h4+ and Black loses his queen) 34 fxg6 ♖xg6; for instance, 35 ♘xf6 (35 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 36 ♗g5 allows major simplifications after the unexpected 36...♘f4! 37 ♗xf6+ ♕xf6 38 ♘xf6 ♘xh3 when Black keeps his material and positional advantage, as given by Neishtadt in *Pervy chempion mira*) 35...♖xf6 36 ♗g5 ♘f4 (Neishtadt considers this move dubious and recommends either 36...♖af8 37 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 38 ♗f5 ♔g8, when the black king is relatively safe in a rather complicated position, or 36...♖xf1 37 ♗xe7 ♗g1+, when White should take a draw by repetition since after 38 ♔g3 ♖g8 he would most probably lose his light-squared bishop) 37 ♕h4 ♖af8 38 g3 *(D)*.

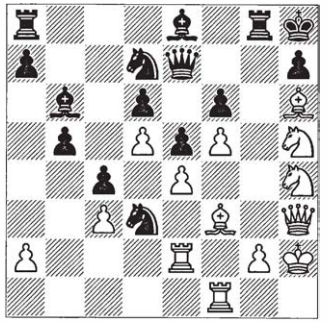
B



Neishtadt considers that this position favours White. However, after the calm move 38...♗e3!, strengthening his control of the dark squares, Black gets an excellent position, in spite of being an exchange down: 39 ♗xf6+ (if White tries to question the stability of the e3-bishop with 39 ♖f3, Black has the tactical resource 39...♘xd5!, keeping his material advantage; it is revealing that in the final position Black has managed to include almost all his pieces in the defence) 39...♖xf6 40 gxf4 exf4. Now White faces the unpleasant threat of 41...f3! followed by an immediate 42...♖h6. After a defence like 41 ♗h5 the last reserves have time to return to their bases: 41...♘c5 42 ♖g2 ♘xe4 followed by ...♘g3, eliminating any potential danger along the g-file.

33...♘ac5 34 ♖e2 ♘d7 *(D)*

W



Black has overprotected all his potentially weak points and is ready to start an offensive on the other wing.

35 g3 a5 36 ♘g2 b4 37 ♘e3 ♖c8 38 ♘d1 bxc3 39 ♘xc3 ♗d4 40 ♗d2 ♘7c5

Black has obtained a more or less winning position. This game is an excellent illustration of one of Steinitz's favourite themes: the economy of resources in defence. The king's position contained no critical weaknesses, while the

very few black pieces assisting him fulfilled clearly defined defensive tasks.

I would like to highlight another related aspect, which Steinitz failed to mention in his writings. In the diagram position, the black knights as well as the dark-squared bishop appeared to be completely isolated from the kingside events. We saw, however, in the comments to the 33rd move that they were able to intervene in some critical moments (...♘f4, ...♗e3, ...♗g1 or ...♘a4-c5-d7). This induces the idea that, although the board is sometimes too wide for some of the pieces, the opposite wings tend to communicate with each other. In case of well planned and calculated play, the pieces sent to attacking missions on remote sides of the board can get back in time to parry an attack on the other wing.

As mentioned, one important detail allowing the economy of forces is the absence of critical weaknesses. Neishtadt writes "Facing the attack against the h7-square (say, along the b1-h7 diagonal), Steinitz often defended it with the 'backward' manoeuvre ...♘d7-f8, avoiding pawn moves (...g6 or ...h6)".

The manoeuvre itself certainly fits well into the whole concept, but I have found only one relevant game from his practice, played, by coincidence, against the same opponent.

B

Lasker – Steinitz
Philadelphia Wch (5) 1894

Many players of those times would have tried to find a way to make use of the seemingly active position of the knight. Steinitz understood how unstable the e5-square is, while also anticipating Lasker's plan of exerting pressure against the h7-pawn.

15...♘d7!? 16 ♖ad1 a5 17 c3 a4 18 ♗c2 ♖e8 19 ♕h3 ♘f8 20 ♗e3 ♕a5 21 a3 ♕b5

Black has a solid position.

When talking about the manoeuvre ...♘d7-f8 in Steinitz's games, Neishtadt must have relied on something more consistent than just one game. Here is a possible explanation of the slight discordance: in his game annotations, the first World Champion used to suggest improvements for the defending side; he might have recommended this method of defence quite frequently, although he didn't have the occasion to employ it too much in his games. Anyway, since it looks like an integral part of his whole system, we can attribute to him the paternity of ...♘d7-f8. The method itself retains its relevance. Here is a slightly more refined form of it, from a game played almost 100 years later.

W

Karpov – M. Gurevich
Reggio Emilia 1991/2

White has a clear superiority on the queenside and in the centre, but his king is exposed to a possible attack involving the whole black army (with the exception, perhaps, of the a8-rook).

14 ♘f1

The h2-pawn was the most probable target for a sacrifice.

14...♘g6 15 a4 ♘h4

One superficial glance at the position is enough to see that Black's kingside pressure has taken on a dangerous form. But does he have any concrete threats?

16 ♘g3!

Yes he does! If White continued his queenside play with, say, 16 a5 he would fall under a dangerous attack: 16...♘xg2!? 17 ♔xg2 ♕e6 18 ♘g3 ♕h3+ 19 ♔g1 ♘g4 20 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 21 f4 exf3 with strong compensation (as given by Karpov in *Informator*). We can see that playing a strong defensive move is no less laudable than carrying out a spectacular attack. When playing 16 ♘g3, Karpov had to calculate the attack starting with 16...♘xg2 and, as an additional task compared to the attacker, find a way to prevent it.

16...♘f5

White is now much better prepared for the sacrifice on g2. After 16...♘xg2 17 ♔xg2 ♕e6 he could make use of the f1-square to regroup with 18 ♗f1!; for instance, 18...♕h3+ (18...h5 19 d5 gives White the initiative in the centre, even if he does have to give back the knight in case of ...h4) 19 ♔g1 ♕h4 20 ♗g2 attacking Black's main weakness, when 20...♘g4 is probably not too dangerous after the calm 21 ♘cxe4.

Black can try to include more forces in the attack by playing 16...h5, when the pawn is taboo because of threats against g2. White then has two satisfactory continuations:

a) 17 c5 and in case of 17...♗xg3, White replies 18 fxg3! ♘f5 19 ♖f1, trying to take advantage of the weakened black kingside. It is not easy for Black to establish a blockade on the d5-square, since several pawns need protection: b7, h5 and e4.

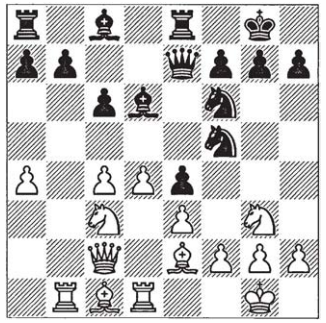
b) 17 ♖b3 is the other idea (more about this move in the next comment). Against 17...♘xg2 18 ♔xg2 h4 White is best advised to return the material in order to get a favourable endgame: 19 ♘cxe4! ♘xe4 20 ♕xe4 ♕xe4+ 21 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 22 f3 ♖e6 23 e4 with an impressive pawn-centre.

We now return to 16...♘f5 *(D)*:

17 ♖b3

Karpov doesn't make any comment on this mysterious move, which is typical of his style. (He might have considered it too natural to need any further explanation, forgetting that among us, the readers, there are plenty of those who will never be world champion.) Taking advantage of the fact that Black's attack has been

W



slowed down for the moment, he prepares his offensive on the other wing. White's basic plan consists of c5 followed by d5. This would leave the c5-pawn undefended. The idea behind ♖b3 is to discourage ...♕xc5 by making ♗a3 possible. However, the rook is exposed on b3, so Karpov needed to be ready to sacrifice the exchange in lines where Black plays ...♗e6 following exchanges on d5.

17...♘xg3

Against 17...h5 Karpov gives 18 ♘f1 without any further comments. He might have had in mind to answer 18...♘h4 (which creates the same threat of ...♘xg2) with a similar break as in the game: 19 c5 ♗c7 20 d5 cxd5 21 ♘xd5 ♘xd5 22 ♖xd5 ♗e6 23 ♕xe4 with compensation for the exchange due to Black's numerous weaknesses as well as his slightly uncoordinated pieces.

With the white pawn still on c4, 17...♗xg3 18 hxg3 h5 is premature in view of 19 ♗a3 followed by d5.

18 hxg3

The triumph of the economy of resources in defence: the knight has done its job on g3; without the necessity of misplacing any other piece, White managed to remove the immediate danger. As a consequence, he will be able to proceed with his plan in the centre.

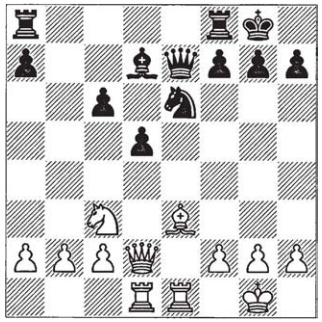
18...h5 19 c5 ♗c7 20 d5

Karpov's claim that White already has an advantage might be slightly exaggerated (Gurevich should now have taken on d5), but it is clear that the play is going his way.

The central theme of the chapter is presented in an even more pure form in the following

extract, although the white knight didn't go to f1.

B



Karpov – Korchnoi
Merano Wch (2) 1981

White has emerged from the opening with a slight advantage. He has strong pressure in the centre and the better structure. Black's central pawns, in conjunction with the strong knight, provide a certain stability, but his bishop is rather passive.

White's main plan is to transfer the knight (his only piece which is not placed yet on an ideal position) to d3, in order to block the black centre. With his next few moves, Korchnoi tries to create some pressure against the apparently undefended white kingside.

17...♕h4 18 ♘e2

In the book *Na shakhmatnom Olimpe* Karpov mentions that 18 b3 ♖fe8 19 ♘e2 is a more precise move-order, preventing an eventual ...a5-a4, which would help Black get rid of one of his weaknesses.

18...♖fe8

Missing his chance. Better is 18...a5 19 b3 a4.

19 b3

Now everything is in order again. White threatens 20 c4.

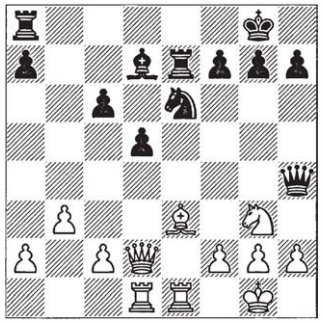
19...♖e7

In this situation, 19...a5 would leave Black with a chronic weakness after 20 a4.

20 ♘g3! *(D)*

This temporary deviation from the main plan is the most efficient way of parrying the threats. Just as in the case of 17 ♖b3 from the previous example, Karpov doesn't make any comment on this remarkable move. After the 'consistent' 20 ♘c1 Black can get sufficient counterplay with 20..♖ae8; for instance, 21 ♗xa7 (or 21 f3 ♘f4 and, suddenly, Black attacks with all his pieces) 21...♘f4 22 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 23 ♗e3 ♘xg2! 24 ♗g5!? (24 ♔xg2? allows a decisive attack starting with 24...♗h3+) and now the safest route to equality is the unexpected 24...♖e1+!? 25 ♖xe1 ♘xe1.

B



20...♕f6

It appears that the threat of ♘f5 is not so easy to parry. For instance, 20...♘f8? loses the queen to 21 ♗g5 ♖xe1+ 22 ♖xe1 ♕g4 23 h3 (Karpov).

21 f3

Unlike the move g3 which Black hoped to provoke, this is not really a weakness. White takes control of some important light squares and prepares a refuge for the bishop on f2.

21...♗e8

Under the new circumstances, Black would have a hard job justifying the pawn sacrifice that 21...♖ae8 involves. The text-move looks passive, but is the most convenient way of allowing the queen's rook to be centralized. Advancing the a-pawn would only accentuate its weakness.

22 ♘e2

Having contributed to the removal of the danger on the e-file, the knight switches back to its main route.

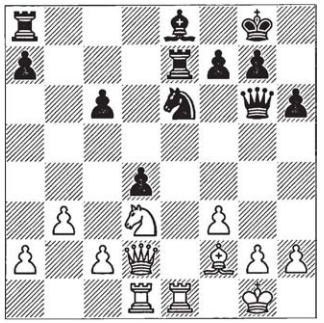
22...h6 23 ♗f2 ♕g6 24 ♘c1 d4?!

Understanding that he is about to lose the strategic battle, Korchnoi becomes desperate, but only creates an additional weakness.

25 ♘d3 *(D)*

Not, of course 25 ♗xd4? because of 25...♖d7.

B



Of White's last eight moves, five were by his knight. Without needing to dismantle his strong nucleus of pieces in the centre, he has succeeded in both preventing Black's kingside activity and blockading the central pawns. The strength and apparent simplicity of such an approach must have affected Korchnoi in a psychological way. Nine moves later he blundered a pawn in an unpleasant, but still defensible, position.

25...♕f6

Korchnoi might have hoped to play ...c5-c4 at some point, but, move after move, Karpov prevents him from reconnecting his central pawns. For instance, 25...c5 is impossible because of 26 ♘xc5.

26 ♗g3 ♖d7

And now, against 26...c5 there is 27 ♗d6.

27 ♖e5 ♕d8 28 ♖de1 ♖d5 29 ♖xd5 ♕xd5 30 ♖e5 ♕d7 31 ♕e1 ♖c8 32 b4

Finally blocking the enemy pawns by physical means.

32...♕d8 33 ♖a5 ♕d7 34 h3 f6? 35 ♖xa7

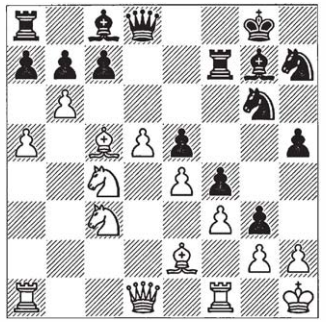
and White won.

Karpov made very efficient use of his defensive resources in this example. The apparent ease with which he did so should not mislead us, however. When watching a ballet dancer we are often tempted to forget about gravity; trying to imitate his actions would most probably cause a painful accident.

Let's return to the moment of 16 ♘g3 from the game Karpov-Gurevich. We have seen how important the concrete calculation was, anticipating Black's intentions. I remember a remarkable moment from a game I played years ago against Chernin. I was Black in a King's Indian and my queenside was completely destroyed. Moreover, my kingside attack hadn't yet taken on too concrete a form. Instead of concentrating of the continuation of his plan, Chernin spent a considerable amount of time with his eyes focused on his king's position. When he considered that the examination was complete, he made some moves on the queenside and soon forced my resignation. If I hadn't known him as a serious player, I would have considered this behaviour to be mere ostentation. However, I understood that this was the right approach: before proceeding with the offensive, White had to be absolutely sure that his king's position would resist with a minimum of defensive resources.

We shall see in the next examples where a superficial treatment of such situations can lead.

W



From the diagrammed position, GM Ognjen Cvitan managed to gather two eminent scalps within a short period of time.

Epishin – Cvitan
Switzerland blitz 1997

This game continued:

21 ♘b5

Quite logical for the moment.

21...♕h4 22 ♗g1 ♗h3 23 ♖e1?

It is hard to criticize this move, played with just a few minutes on the clock. Apparently, Black's pieces gathered on the kingside are not

too well coordinated; this sensation might have numbed Epishin's sense of danger. White's only playable continuation is 23 gxh3 ♕xh3 24 ♖f2! gxf2 25 ♗xf2 when White's queenside play compensates for the sacrificed exchange.

Exercise 2.1

Can you find a winning attack for Black? (It might be best to look at the position from the white side.)

Ftačnik – Cvitan
Bundesliga 1997/8

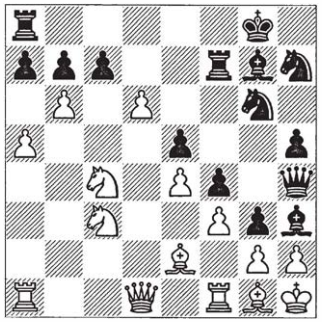
The other game was played with a normal time rate, which makes White's carelessness even more notable:

21 d6

Not an essential difference as we shall see.

21...♕h4 22 ♗g1 ♗h3!? *(D)*

W



Now Ftačnik unsuspectingly played:

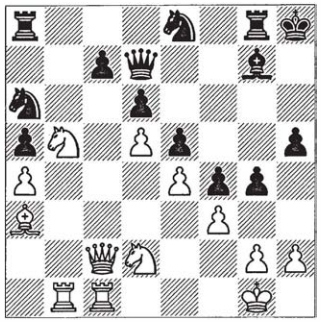
23 bxc7?

This allowed the same combination.

Remaining in the domain of closed positions with mutual attacks on opposite wings, we shall now examine two important aspects of the communication between the wings, a complement to our main theme, already mentioned in the notes to Lasker-Steinitz.

In the following diagram, White has sacrificed a pawn to open lines on the queenside and exchange one of Black's most dangerous attacking piece, the light-squared bishop. As a consequence of this exchange, ...g3 is not a

B



M. Gurevich – Marin
Tilburg 1993

serious threat any more since it can be safely met by h3. Therefore, Black has to concentrate his efforts on preparing ...gxf3. This detail simplifies to a certain extent White's task, allowing him to allocate a relatively reduced number of forces to defensive purposes.

27...♗h6 28 ♕c6 ♖d8!?

The position resulting after 28...♕xc6 29 ♖xc6 ♖g7 30 ♖bc1 is no fun at all for Black. With my last move I invited Gurevich to help me connect my rooks, if he really wanted to exchange queens.

29 ♖c2!?

A strong prophylactic move.

Black obtains a strong attack after 29 ♕xa6? gxf3 30 ♘xf3 ♕g4 (threatening both ...♕xf3 and ...♕xg2#) 31 ♘e1 f3!, while 29 ♕xd7 ♖xd7 followed by ...♖dg7 is perfectly playable for Black. The idea behind the rook move to c2 is to prepare the defence of the g2-square in case of ...gxf3. The same rook that exerts pressure along the c-file can also fulfil defensive tasks. Such forms of wing communications are usually available to the side enjoying a space advantage.

29...♘f6?

In his notes for *Informator*, Gurevich recommends 29...gxf3(?) 30 ♘xf3 ♕g4 as interesting, failing to notice that 31 ♘xe5 wins on the spot. This is another manifestation of the communication between the wings, although not of a defensive character.

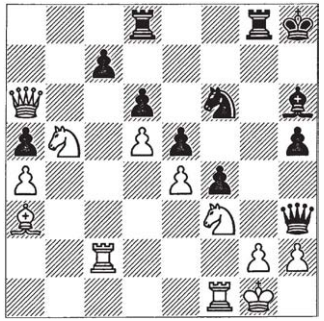
Black's best chance, not mentioned by Gurevich, is probably 29...h4 30 ♕xa6 h3, by which

Black attacks the critical g2-square while refraining from ...gxf3, thus preventing the white rook from defending it!

30 ♕xa6 gxf3 31 ♘xf3 ♕h3 32 ♖f1! *(D)*

The possibility of this strong defensive move is another merit of the subtle 29 ♖c2. White consolidates on the light squares, winning some time to prepare his counterattack.

B



32...♘xe4 33 ♘xc7 ♖g4

Black has to double rooks on the g-file, but, curiously, he has no good squares on which to do so! For instance, 33...♖g6 allows an already familiar trick (34 ♘xe5!), while on g7 or g5 the rook would come under attack from the other knight, by ♘e6. On g4, the rook cuts off the way back for the queen, not only exposing it to being trapped, but also giving the white queen a free hand on the h3-c8 diagonal.

However, these are only general considerations. Black has concentrated a lot of force against the enemy kingside; he needs just one tempo (...♖dg8) to get a dangerous attack. Can the apparently disorganized white army prevent it?

34 ♗xd6!

Yes it can! This move opens by tactical means the communication between the wings, this time for counterattacking purposes. Gurevich correctly points out that 34 ♔h1 gets White nowhere due to 34...♘g3+, while 34 ♕e2 ♖dg8 offers Black dangerous play.

However, just as in a previous comment, he overlooks the possibility of 34 ♘xe5! which is also entirely playable.

34...♖xd6

As bad as anything else. After 34...♖dg8 35 ♗xe5+ ♔h7 36 ♕e2 ♖xg2+ 37 ♕xg2 White has a considerable material advantage, while the black king is very exposed.

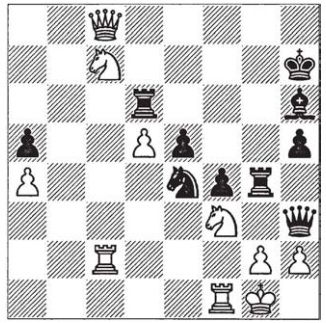
34...♘xd6 leaves Black without the resource ...♘g3, allowing 35 ♔h1!, which traps the queen.

35 ♕c8+

A direct consequence of 33...♖g4. The white pieces sent on remote aggressive missions will manage to regroup in time to prevent the enemy forces from coordinating.

35...♔h7 *(D)*

W



36 ♘e6!

With the terrible threat of ♖c7+.

36...♖xd5

36...♗g7 loses the queen to the elegant 37 ♘eg5+!; the same goes for 36...♘f6 37 ♔h1!.

37 ♕b7+ 1-0

3 How Real is the Threat?

When facing a threat, the first thing most players think about is how to defend against it.

This natural reaction is not always the best; sometimes it is worth asking yourself: is the threat real? More often than expected, you will discover that the threat is more of an optical illusion and you can safely proceed with your own plan. This usually proves the opponent's last move(s) to be a mere waste of time and is thus highly beneficial.

Besides the objective merits of correctly ignoring a threat, there are some important psychological facets too. The opponent faces a difficult decision. Should he accept his mistake and search for a new plan? Or maybe try to make his threat work anyway? The problem is that there is no general answer to this question; every position has to be considered individually.

In inferior positions, the ignoring approach is expected to be not entirely sound, but could favourably influence the battle from a psychological point of view. This was the case in the following example.

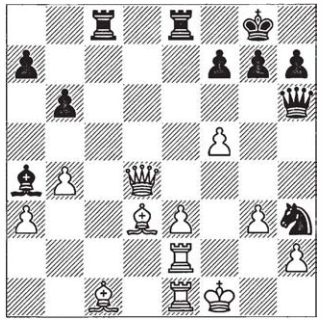
After the death, in 1795, of Philidor, the first uncrowned king of the chess history, France continued to hold the supremacy in chess for a long time. Players like Deschapelles and, especially, La Bourdonnais quite convincingly defeated their rivals, the most significant of whom were the English players.

In 1843, the legendary café "La Régence" hosted a historic match, between Saint Amant and Staunton. Much to the disappointment of the public, the Englishman crushed his renowned opponent: from the first eight games Saint Amant managed to make only one draw. The position in the following diagram arose in the ninth game.

In spite of his small material advantage, White is in trouble: his army is disorganized and his territory full of weaknesses. When Staunton played...

31...♖ed8

B



Saint Amant – Staunton
Paris (9) 1843

...he probably thought that his eighth win was not far away. If the attacked queen moves, the light-squared bishop will be lost.

32 b5!!

This is a multi-purpose move: White ignores the threat and attacks the bishop, at the same time interfering with the important a4-e8 diagonal. From an objective point of view, the move shouldn't have saved the game, but it is definitely a better chance than 32 ♕e4 ♘g5 33 ♕b7 (the only way to prevent ...♖xd3) 33...♗c6. The merits of the move are more of a psychological nature: confronted with unexpected concrete problems, at a moment when he might have already been thinking about which restaurant to choose for dinner, Staunton completely lost his concentration.

32...♕h5?

White's basic idea was that after 32...♖xd4 33 exd4 he creates two strong threats: ♗xh6 and ♖e8+ followed by mate (it is here where the interference on the a4-e8 diagonal is important). If Staunton hadn't relaxed prematurely, it is possible that he would have found the way to parry both threats: 33...g5! (in the book *Nekoronovanye Chempiony* Neishtadt overlooks this move and suggests 33...♕xc1 34 ♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 35 ♔g2 ♘f4+ 36 gxf4 ♔f8, but after 37 f6 White is probably not worse). Black should win, but a few accurate moves are still needed; it is possible that Staunton had seen 33...g5, but considered it too complicated. 34 fxg6 ♕h5! (34...♖xc1 leads to a draw by perpetual check, in spite of the fact that one of the white rooks is pinned: 35 gxf7+ ♔xf7 36 ♖e7+ ♔f6 37 ♖e6+ ♔g5 38 ♖e5+ since the king cannot escape to g4: 38...♔g4?? 39 ♗e2#) 35 gxh7+ (this pawn looks dangerous, but White cannot support it with his pieces) 35...♔g7 36 g4!? (after 36 ♔g2 ♗xb5! White has no time for 37 ♗xb5 ♕xb5 38 ♔xh3 because of 38...♖xc1) 36...♕d5 37 ♗e4 ♕xb5 and White cannot coordinate his pieces due to the threat of ...♖xc1 and ...♘f4.

Neishtadt also recommends 32...♗d1 "winning the exchange" but the position resulting after 33 ♖xd1 ♖xd4 34 exd4 ♕h5 35 ♔g2 is far from clear: White has enough material for the queen, while the d-pawn might become very dangerous.

From Neishtadt's suggestions, only the third one, 32...♘g5 33 ♕xa4 ♕h3+ 34 ♖g2 ♖xd3 is correct: Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

The mistakes in the analysis of the renowned Soviet author speak for the merits of Saint Amant's move: it creates problems that are difficult to solve not only over the board, but also in the peace and quiet of home analysis.

33 g4 *(D)*

B

This must have been the second surprise for Staunton, who suddenly lost his patience and took the enervating queen at the least favourable moment:

33...♖xd4??

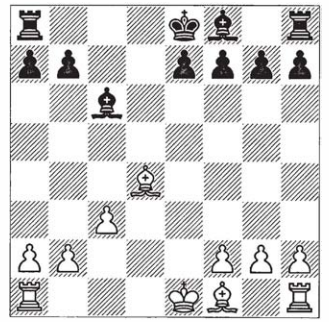
The position would have remained unclear after 33...♕h4 34 ♕xa4 ♖xd3 (Neishtadt).

34 exd4 f6 35 gxh5 1-0

This was a turning point in this historic confrontation; in the remaining games Saint Amant managed to score five more wins. Even if this was not enough to avoid losing the match, he was able to declare that "honour was saved".

Ignoring a strong threat is most likely to be possible in a superior position. A typical picture is that the opponent tries to solve his problems of development, coordination, etc., by attacking one of your pieces, failing to notice in advance that his position is not yet ripe yet for creating significant threats. This was the case in the next two examples, where Black's threats were more of an optical illusion.

W



Ghinda – Bogdanovich
Budapest 1987

It might appear that the position is equal. Each side has only one bishop developed while their remaining bishops have slight problems because of the pressure against g2 and g7. However, White's developed bishop is more active than the black one, and keeps an eye on both wings. Besides, the c6-bishop is also more exposed, as White's next moves demonstrate.

12 a4! h5!? 13 ♗b5 ♖h6 14 0-0 a6

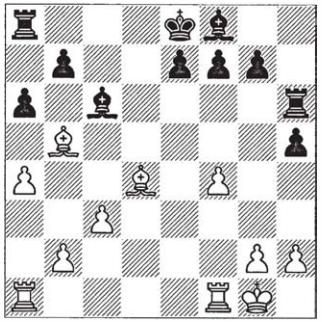
If White now exchanged on c6 or retreated his bishop, then Black's slightly artificial play would be crowned with success. His rooks would get connected (by ...♖xc6 or ...♖d6), making the problem of developing the f8-bishop

less critical. Looking for a way to maintain his advantage in development, Ghinda discovered that the threat of ...axb5 is not so real.

15 f4! *(D)*

A very strong move, threatening a further advance of the pawn, when most of the important squares on the sixth rank would be under White's control and the freeing moves ...e6 and ...g6 would become problematic.

B



15...axb5

Black bravely accepts the challenge. 15...♖c8 is more prudent although White can keep an advantage: 16 ♗e2 (the simpler 16 ♗xc6+ ♖hxc6 17 f5 is also playable) 16...♖g6 17 ♖f2 h4 18 f5 ♖d6 19 ♗g4 and Black is still far from completing his development.

16 axb5 ♖xa1 17 ♖xa1 ♖d6

When embarking upon this forced line, Black might have overlooked that after 17...♗xb5 18 ♖a8+ ♔d7 19 ♖xf8 f6 he would lose a pawn: 20 ♖f7 ♖g6 (after 20...♖h7 White should probably play 21 ♗c5, since the spectacular 21 ♗xf6 ♔e6 22 ♖xg7 ♖xg7 23 ♗xg7 leads to an endgame where in spite of the two extra pawns the win is highly problematic) 21 ♗c5. However, this might be the lesser evil; Black maintains drawing chances due to the opposite-coloured bishops. In the game he keeps the material balance, but gets into a very passive position.

18 bxc6 bxc6

Black is forced to weaken his pawns, since 18...♖xc6? loses to 19 ♖a8+.

19 b4 ♖d8 20 ♖a7 ♖c8 21 ♗c5

In spite of the mass-exchanges, White has maintained (and possibly increased) his advantage in development; his king has easy access to the queenside while the black pieces are passive. Ghinda went on to win the game, but the details of this procedure are outside our subject.

B

Portisch – Torre
Manila 1974

White has a slight advantage in development, but the position is tricky in view of the exposed position of both queens and Black's pressure against the long dark diagonal. Not wishing to be pushed back in the centre and on the kingside by a later f4 and e5, Black starts immediate queenside counterplay.

12...a5

At the time when the game was played, this was considered the best move, bearing a seal of approval from a former world champion. The threat of ...a4-a3 looks very unpleasant.

13 ♗f4!

Very typical for Portisch: instead of looking for a mechanical way to parry the threat, he tries to make a developing move work.

The previous game went 13 ♖d1 ♕b4 (after 13...a4? White wins a pawn by 14 ♖d4) 14 ♖b1 ♘bd7 15 ♗e3 ♕xd6 16 ♖xd6 a4 17 ♘c5 a3 with sufficient counterplay for Black, Smejkal-Tal, Leningrad IZ 1973.

13...a4?

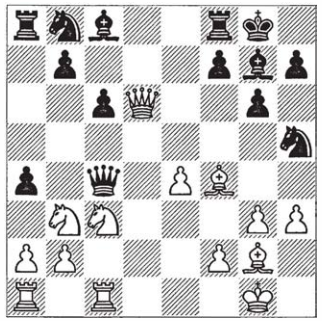
Black must have thought that his strong opponent had just blundered something. Besides the concrete line in the game, the merits of Portisch's move are also underlined by the fact that 13...♕b4 is less strong than in Tal's game: White has the natural retreat 14 ♕d2 at his disposal, creating the threat of ♗d6 and maintaining his advantage in development.

14 ♖fc1!!

A very cunning move. It suddenly appears that 14...axb3 is not a threat at all, because of 15 axb3, winning material for White. Black's other threat, the less obvious ...a3, is also parried by defending the c3-knight. The f1-square is cleared for a possible ♗f1, driving the queen away from its active position and placing the bishop on a potentially more influential diagonal.

14...♘h5 *(D)*

W



Trying to complicate matters, but temporarily misplacing the knight.

15 ♗f1!

15 ♘d5?! is premature: 15...cxd5 16 ♖xc4 dxc4 17 ♘d4 ♘xf4 18 gxf4 a3 gives Black good compensation for the queen, as mentioned by Trifunović.

15...♕e6 16 ♘c5 ♕xd6 17 ♗xd6

White has managed to install all his previously attacked pieces in active positions and preserves his advantage in development. Both the f8-rook and the a3-pawn are hanging now.

17...a3

After 17...♖d8 18 ♗c7 ♖d2 White's simplest answer is 19 ♖d1!, exchanging the last active black piece and taking the control of the d-file.

18 bxa3 ♖d8 19 ♗c7 ♖e8 20 g4

It was very tempting, of course, to force the black knight to block the long diagonal and to set a cunning trap at the same time. However, the possibility of connecting his knights offers Black additional defensive possibilities.

20 ♖ab1!? might be more precise, when the h5-knight will be out of play for a while; for instance: 20...♖xa3 21 ♗xb8 ♖xc3 22 ♖xc3 ♗xc3 23 ♘xb7 ♗xb7 24 ♖xb7 ♖xe4. The bishop-pair, the dangerous a-pawn and the weakness of the f7-pawn guarantee White an advantage.

20...♖xa3?

Black blunders a piece in a playable position. After the simple retreat 20...♘f6 White has serious problems proving a concrete advantage; for instance: 21 ♖ab1 (Trifunović gives 21 a4 'with a clear advantage' but Black seems to have an acceptable position after 21...♗f8 22 ♗b6 ♗xc5 23 ♗xc5 ♘bd7 followed by ...♘xe4) 21...♘bd7 22 ♘xb7 ♖a7 23 ♘d6 ♖xc7 24 ♘cb5 (the tempting move 24 g5 is answered by 24...♗f8! removing the bishop from the vulnerable g7-square and also attacking the d6-knight) 24...♖e6! 25 g5 ♘h5 26 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 27 ♗c4 ♘e5 28 ♗xe6+ ♗xe6 29 ♘xc7 ♘f3+. In spite of White's considerable material advantage, the position is rather sharp, because of the exposed position of both kings.

21 ♘b3!

Torre probably saw this simple move, but he might have missed that 21...♗e6 fails to maintain the material balance, due to 22 gxh5 ♗xb3 23 axb3 ♖xa1 24 ♖xa1 ♗xc3 25 ♖a8!. Black's lack of development finally makes itself felt in a more concrete form.

After 21 ♘b3, Black tried to lose the piece in a different way, but failed to get enough compensation and went on to lose.

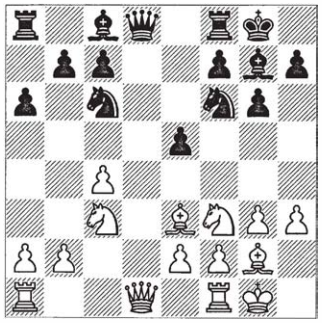
Ignoring a threat is possible in balanced positions as well. Sometimes, such an approach is a necessity in order to prevent the initiative from passing to the opponent.

The position in the following diagram is entirely normal, but very soon degenerates as a result of Black's mistaken evaluation of the situation.

10...♗e6 11 ♘g5!

Instead of defending the attacked pawn, White invites his opponent to take it. After a passive move like 11 b3 Black would take over the initiative with 11...♕e7 followed by ...♖ad8 and ...♘d4. Besides its objective merits, my last move had also the effect of a red rag waved in front of a bull.

B



Marin – Shirov
Spanish Cht (Barcelona) 2000

11...♗xc4?

I was very surprised not only by the move itself but especially by the rapidity of the answer. Both 11...♗f5 and 11...♗d7 were worth considering and I would have had to decide between 12 ♕b3, 12 ♘d5 and 12 ♘ge4 in order to take advantage of my control of the central light squares.

12 b3 ♗e6

12...h6 13 bxc4 hxg5 14 ♗xg5 doesn't look very appealing either. White keeps strong pressure on the long diagonal and the b-file. The crossing point (the b7-pawn) of these two thoroughfares is a desperate weakness. Nevertheless, this might have been less of an evil than the game continuation. Of course, if Shirov had played this and gone on to lose the game, I might have recommended 12...♗e6 "when at least Black has an extra pawn to compensate for the weaknesses".

13 ♘xe6 fxe6 14 ♗xc6! bxc6

Black could have avoided the pin of the knight by exchanging queens himself: 14...♕xd1 15 ♖fxd1 bxc6, but this helps White centralize his pieces and after 16 ♖ac1 ♘d5 17 ♗d2 a5 18 ♘a4 the strong black knight cannot compensate for all those weaknesses.

15 ♕xd8 ♖fxd8 16 ♗g5 a5 17 ♖ac1 ♔f7 18 ♖c2 ♖a6 19 ♖fc1

Shirov defended this awful position for 40 more moves, but couldn't save the game. This game was of great competitive importance: by ignoring the false threat to my c4-pawn, I helped my team avoid the real threat of relegation.

Bridge Between the Centuries

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.
(ECCLESIASTES 1; 9-10)

The following three examples are characterized by a strong similarity. I have not arranged them in their chronological order; I preferred to present the examples in the same succession as I experienced them.

W

Suba – Marin
Badalona 1993

Around this point, I considered my position to be entirely playable. As compensation for the passively placed knights, Black has some pressure along the b-file and the long diagonal and enjoys the prospect of shutting White's dark-squared bishop out of play with a well-timed ...f4.

18 ♖e2

White intends to double rooks on the e-file, but I thought I had a remedy against this plan.

18...♖b4

18...f4 is probably premature, because it leaves the h5-knight just as misplaced as the h2-bishop, and it surrenders the e4-square to White.

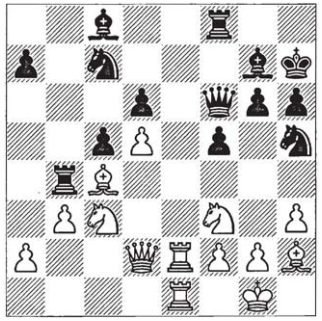
19 b3 ♕f6

This was my idea; after forcing White to weaken the long diagonal, I hoped to have prevented his plan, at least for a while.

20 ♖ae1!! *(D)*

This move came like a thunder from a clear blue sky – I didn't suspect that Suba would ignore such a serious threat as winning a whole piece. My idea would have been justified after 20 ♖c1 ♗d7 followed by ...♖f7, when, in order to make progress, White would have to move the knight away. In that case, the absence of the threat of ♘e4 makes ..f4 playable.

B



20...♕xc3?!

I remember that I was in such a state of shock that I simply couldn't think about anything else except taking the knight. I should have understood that my pieces were too uncoordinated to accept such a challenge, but playing a preventive move like 20...♖f7 would have meant, from a psychological point of view, the failure of all my previous play. However, this would have been Black's best chance. Then White can play 21 ♘a4 to create the threat of ♖e6. Play might continue 21...f4 22 a3 (driving the rook away to prevent a later ..♖xc4, which would undermine the e6-pawn) 22...♖b7 23 ♖e6! ♕d8 (relatively best; the immediate acceptance of the sacrifice is bad: 23...♗xe6 24 dxe6 ♖e7 25 ♕xd6 followed by ♘xc5) and it is not easy to strengthen the position; for instance: 24 ♕d3 ♘xe6 25 dxe6 ♖f5 covering the g6-pawn and preparing an eventual ...d5. After 20...♖f7 White can also consider ideas with ♘e5 or ♘a4xc5, but the position remains difficult to play for both sides.

21 ♕xc3?!

An inaccuracy committed right after a brilliant decision is usually the proof of the intuitive character of the whole operation. Once you find a move like 20 ♖ae1! you understand immediately that it should be correct and there should be no reason to refrain from it; however, concrete calculation is needed in the next phase of the game.

By prematurely exchanging on c3 and allowing the e1-rook to be attacked, White agrees to invest even more material in the whole operation, which offers Black chances to defend.

The immediate 21 ♗xd6 is better; for instance, 21...♕xd2 (21...♖f7 allows 22 ♕xc3 in a superior form, because White has removed the rook with tempo from the attacked square and most of Black's pieces are left hanging: 22...♗xc3 23 ♖e7 ♖g7 24 ♖1e3!) 22 ♘xd2 ♖f7 23 ♗xc5 ♖b8 (after 23...♖xc4 24 bxc4 White has a material advantage while maintaining a dominant position; Black should defend the e7-square with 24...♗f6 but after the calm 25 ♘f3 the combined threats of d6 and ♘e5 are hard to meet) 24 d6 ♘a6 (this and Black's next few moves are forced, in order to maintain the material balance; however, he cannot resist too long against White's excellently coordinated army) 25 ♖e7 ♖xe7 (25..♖f8 26 ♗xa7 ♖a8 27 ♗d5 gives White a decisive advantage) 26 dxe7 ♘f6 27 ♗xa7 ♖a8 28 e8♕ ♘xe8 29 ♖xe8 ♘c7 30 ♗g8+ ♔h8 31 ♗d5+ ♘xe8 32 ♗xa8 with a decisive material advantage for White.

21...♗xc3 22 ♖e7+

Even now, 22 ♗xd6 is stronger, attempting to transpose to the previous note; in case of 22...♗xe1 (or 22...♔g8 23 ♗xc7 ♗xe1 24 ♖xe1) 23 ♗xf8 Black can't enjoy his material advantage for too long.

22...♔g8 23 ♖xc7 ♗xe1 *(D)*

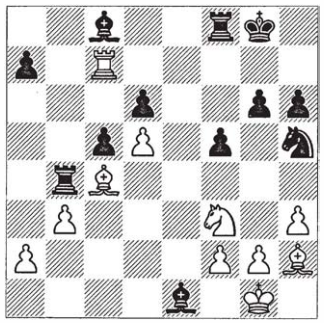
I considered that, being a whole rook down, White would now play 24 ♘xe1, when 24..f4 leads to a good position for Black. I didn't enjoy for too long such a rosy perspective; the second shock came rather quickly:

24 ♗xd6!! ♖e8

Forced, in order to defend all the attacked pieces.

25 ♗xc5 ♘f6?!

When defending a position with a considerable material advantage, it is very difficult to decide when to return part of the material and



when to hold on to it. After 25...♖xc4 26 bxc4 White has excellent compensation for the piece, but possibly no more than that.

26 ♘xe1 ♖b7?!

Very inconsistent; Black didn't want to sacrifice an exchange on the previous move and now refrains from taking a whole knight!

26...♖xe1+ 27 ♔h2 ♖b8 is the best practical chance; it seems like White has nothing better than 28 ♗xa7 (28 d6+ ♗e6 29 ♖e7 is not dangerous due to 29...♗xc4) 28...♖a8 29 ♗d4! ♘e8 30 d6+ ♗e6 31 ♖e7 ♘xd6 (31...♗xc4 is less efficient now, because after 32 ♖xe1 the bishop has to place the d7-square under control with 32...♗b5, when White keeps a strong initiative in a position with relative material equality: 33 a4 ♗c6 34 ♖e6) 32 ♖xe6 (unfortunately, White is forced to exchange his rook) 32...♖xe6 33 ♗xe6+ ♔f8 34 a4 ♔e7 35 ♗d5. The white pawns look threatening, but Black should be able to maintain the balance, because of his better placed king.

27 d6+ ♔h8 28 ♘d3 ♖xc7 29 dxc7 ♔h7 30 ♗d4 ♘e4 31 ♗e5

White has a material advantage and a very active position. Black struggled for 15 more moves but without success.

Throughout my whole carrier, I have been a receptive pupil, but this was a rare case when I managed to prove that I had assimilated the new idea in the very next tournament, starting one day after Badalona.

In the following diagram, White has a considerable advantage in development. My plan was to strengthen my kingside position with ♖f2-g2, ♖af1 and ♘g3, planning an eventual

Marin – Llanos
Berga 1993

sacrifice on e4. Sensing the danger, my young opponent tried to change the course of the game.

15...♘b6

Black wishes to provoke a weakening of the long diagonal, in order to make a kingside operation possible.

After the immediate 15...h6 White plays 16 ♘xe4 fxe4 17 ♗xe4 with a strong attack; for instance: 17...♘f8 18 ♗xg6 ♘xg6 19 f5 ♘e5 20 f6 ♘xc4 21 ♕d3 ♘xe3 22 ♕xe3 ♗f8 23 ♕f3 winning.

16 b3

Black has achieved his first goal, but the b6-knight will be as badly placed as the b4-rook from the previous game.

16...h6 17 ♖f2! hxg5

17...♘f6 fails to 18 ♖g2 ♘g4 19 ♖xg4 fxg4 20 ♗xe4.

18 fxg5 f4!?

The only justification of the previous play. After the more circumspect 18...♕e7 White has time to consolidate: 19 ♖af1 ♕e5 20 ♘d1 ♗d7 21 h4 ♖e8 22 ♘f4 ♘xf4 23 ♗xf4 ♕d4 24 ♕e2 followed by h5, ♘e3, etc.

19 ♘xf4 ♕xg5+

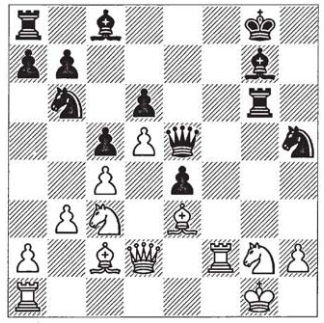
Another try to take advantage of the hanging position of the white knight is 19...♘xf4 20 ♗xf4 ♕f6, as suggested by my opponent. White then maintains his advantage by simpler means than in the game: 21 ♗xe4 ♕xc3 22 ♕xc3 ♗xc3 23 ♖c1.

20 ♘g2!

20 ♖g2 allows the elegant queen sacrifice 20...♘xf4 21 ♖xg5 ♖xg5+ 22 ♔h1 ♖g2 with a

completely unclear position. My last move looks like a blunder, but I remembered Suba's lesson and was going to teach it to my opponent...

20...♕e5 *(D)*



Exercise 3.1

Can White defend the pinned knight?

For a long time, my memory kept these two games classified under the same index. I decided to name the theme after Suba, because I knew that I would only find a precedent by accident; computers cannot yet search for a pattern like *the threat against a hanging piece is ignored by doubling rooks...* You can imagine, however, how surprised I was when almost 10 years later I discovered that the idea was more than a century old (*see following diagram*)!

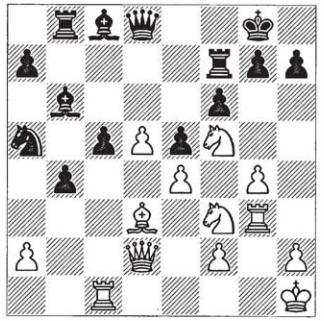
The first impression is that a closed opening must have been played. However, the position arose from an Evans Gambit and the remarkable thing is how Anderssen managed to treat it as if it were a positional variation. White has a dominant position on the kingside, but further progress seems difficult to make. Against g5 there is always ...♗xf5 followed by ...♕xd5, when Black gets the control of the centre. Nevertheless, Anderssen played:

23 g5!

The game continued:

23...♗xf5 24 exf5 ♕xd5 25 gxf6!

The second surprise for Black; Zukertort might have expected 25 ♗c4 ♕xd2 26 ♗xf7+



Anderssen – Zukertort
Barmen 1869

♔xf7 27 ♘xd2 when Black has enough compensation for the exchange.

Instead, 25 g6, trying to win the queen with ♗c4, fails to 25...♖d7.

25...♖d8 *(D)*

This is apparently a very strong move. Instead, 25...♖xf6 loses to 26 ♗c4, while 25...e4 26 ♕h6 ♖bb7 27 ♖cg1 is also a disaster for Black.

Exercise 3.2

Both White's minor pieces are pinned and the threats ...♕xd3 and ...e4 are very strong.

Had Anderssen, the winner of the first international chess tournament and creator of the *Immortal* and *Evergreen* games, really missed Black's last move?

4 The King as a Fighting Unit

The role and importance of the leaders of tribes, nations or kingdoms have been rather varied throughout centuries and millennia of history and from the Far East to the New World.

History has provided us with an impressive gallery of heroic figures, worthy of the title 'The Lord's anointed'. There is, however, a probably even longer list of less glorious leaders who didn't significantly help their nation's prosperity and progress or, in some extreme cases, even caused its decline.

In chess, the image of the king is usually associated with the second situation, at least in the middlegame.

The 'nominal value' of the king is infinite: it cannot be exchanged for any amount of enemy pieces and has to be kept in a safe place, as if it were a precious jewel. In fact, one of the main criteria when evaluating a position is the safety of the king.

There is, however, another aspect, which tends to be neglected, even by strong players. Besides its nominal value, the king has also its own strength, just like any other piece. This strength is generally considered to be more or less equivalent to a minor piece.

Dealing with the dual character of the king (priceless jewel and fighting unit) is by no means easy. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that, when facing an attack, the king can be much more than an immobile target.

In the remote years of the Italian School, kings were treated without the least respect; pawns and pieces were sacrificed in order to open up the king's position. When, much later, Wilhelm Steinitz started to elaborate his system of theories, he understood that things are not so simple.

The king is sometimes strong enough to take care of himself. Steinitz exaggerated, of course when he considered the idea 'the king in the centre is a strong piece' as an organic part of his system. The idea only applies in a limited number of cases, and is more of an exception. In practice, however, Steinitz managed to defend his point of view with remarkable success. Here is the most famous example.

Steinitz – Paulsen
Baden-Baden 1870

1 e4 e5 2 ♘c3 ♘c6 3 f4 exf4 4 d4?! ♕h4+ 5 ♔e2 *(D)*

B

This variation is known as the Steinitz Gambit. In order to build a strong pawn-centre, White accepts the 'temporary inconvenience' of an exposed king. It is easy to state now that the gambit is not entirely correct, but it took theoreticians several decades after Steinitz's death to establish that.

5...d6 6 ♘f3 ♗g4 7 ♗xf4 0-0-0?!

Steinitz's opponents were usually hypnotized by the exposed white king and tried to attack it by primitive methods. They didn't understand that in order to have chances for success, they first had to eliminate White's main strategic trump, the centre. Otherwise, they would have considered more seriously the move ..f5; this is possibly the best moment to do it. An earlier game of Steinitz's continued 7...♗xf3+ 8 ♔xf3 ♘ge7 9 ♗e2 0-0-0 (9...f5!?) 10 ♗e3 ♕f6+ 11 ♔g3 d5 12 ♗g4+ ♔b8 13 e5 ♕g6 14 ♔f2 h5?! (14...♘f5!) 15 ♗h3 f6 16 exf6 ♕xf6+ 17 ♕f3 ♕xf3+ 18 gxf3 and White got excellent play on the weakened g-file in Steinitz-Neumann, Dundee 1867. Please note that in this position, f2 is the best possible square for the white king.

8 ♔e3 ♕h5? 9 ♗e2 ♕a5? 10 a3! ♗xf3 *(D)*

W

11 ♔xf3!

This is not snobbery: in this concrete case, Steinitz's idea about the king's strength applies perfectly. White needs the e3-square for the bishop, in view of the threat ...g5 followed by ...♗g7.

11...♕h5+ 12 ♔e3 ♕h4 13 b4! g5 14 ♗g3 ♕h6 15 b5 ♘ce7 16 ♖f1 ♘f6 17 ♔f2 ♘g6 18 ♔g1!

Steinitz has managed to get his king to a safe square, while maintaining his strategic pluses. The position is entirely normal now – and close to winning for White.

Although the Steinitz Gambit was refuted, the concept of the centralized king didn't completely lose its validity. Here are two games played more than 100 years (or, if you like, 11 world champions) later. I shall not give special annotations to them, because meanwhile theory has progressed a lot. I only want to underline that the presence of the black king on e7 has a similar effect to Steinitz's white king on e2 or e3.

Portisch – Karpov
Biel 1996

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 b6 4 a3 ♗b7 5 ♘c3 d5 6 cxd5 ♘xd5 7 ♕c2 ♘xc3 8 ♕xc3 ♘d7

This move implies the loss of the right to castle. The alternative is 8...h6.

9 ♗g5 ♗e7 10 ♗xe7 ♔xe7 11 e3 ♖c8 12 ♗e2 c5 13 dxc5?

Portisch probably hoped that the following exchanges would help him take advantage of the unusual position of the black king.

13...♖xc5 14 ♕xg7 ♖g8 15 ♕xh7 ♖xg2 16 ♕h4+ ♘f6 17 ♖d1 ♕c7 18 ♘d4 a5 *(D)*

W

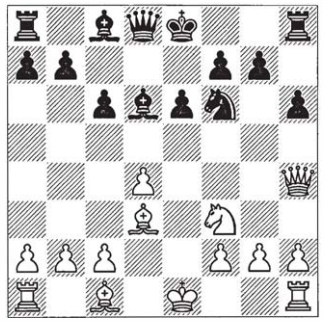
Remarkably enough, Black has better coordination. His king is safer than the white one, and also fulfils the important task of defending the strong knight on f6. Trying to change the course of the game, Portisch now blundered a piece.

19 ♘b5?? ♖xb5 20 ♗xb5 ♖g4 0-1

Kamsky – Karpov
Dortmund 1993

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 dxe4 4 ♘xe4 ♘d7 5 ♘g5 ♘gf6 6 ♗d3 e6 7 ♘1f3 ♗d6 8 ♕e2 h6 9 ♘e4 ♘xe4 10 ♕xe4 ♘f6 11 ♕h4 *(D)*

B



11...♔e7!

At the time this game was played, this fantastic move was a novelty. It later caused 11 ♕h4 to be abandoned in favour of 11 ♕e2. By defending the rook, Black creates the very unpleasant threat of ...g5.

12 ♘e5

This seems to be the most reasonable solution, although it gives White no advantage at all.

12...♗xe5 13 dxe5 ♕a5+ 14 c3 ♕xe5+ 15 ♗e3 b6 16 0-0-0 g5 17 ♕a4 c5 18 ♖he1 ♗d7 19 ♕a3 ♖hd8 20 g3 ♕c7

Black is better.

Although exaggerated, Steinitz's theory concerning the king's strength opened up an entire new area of chess thinking. The king is not only a target for the opponent, but also a piece which can fulfil certain defensive tasks. Storming the castled position is definitely more tempting than a queenside attack, because the prize in case of success is so much higher, but it also presents more difficulties in view of this additional, sometimes underestimated, defender. We often see this situation in soccer matches: one of the teams has a clear superiority, but is unable to score because of a well-trained goalkeeper.

In the next example, the intervention of the king transformed an apparently compromised position into a playable one.

W

Vasiesiu – Marin
Romania 1994

In such sharp openings as the Sicilian Dragon you cannot always be prepared for everything...

19 ♕g2

When this move was played, I sank into deep thought for more than one hour, much to the desperation of our team's captain. I was familiar only with 19 ♕d3 when the exposed position of the queen allowed 19...♗e6 in the game Short-Ki.Georgiev, Novi Sad OL 1990 with an excellent position for Black.

After 19 ♕g2 the same solution is not adequate any more, because of the weakness of the g-file. Therefore, I had to start thinking independently.

White has no immediate threat yet, but in the near future ♗xc4 followed by f4-f5 or ♖hg1 with the idea ♘f5 could be the start of a devastating attack.

Black has a solid pawn-structure and has managed to neutralize the b3-bishop. However, because of the pressure against the e7-pawn it is not so easy to improve the position of his pieces. A normal reaction for a Dragon player would be 19...b4 20 a4 ♖xd5, eliminating the strong centralized knight, but I wasn't satisfied with the position after 21 exd5 ♘b6 22 ♘c6 ♗xc6 23 dxc6 ♕c7 24 f4 e6 25 f5!, when White has a strong attack.

It took me half an hour to understand that I had no way to eliminate the enemy knight; another half-hour was needed to understand that I could not survive for too long with the white knight on d5.

Preparing ...e6 with 19...f6 is also out of the question, because it would irremediably weaken the g6-square.

The only logical conclusion seemed to be that I had to find something else against 1 e4, when, all of a sudden, I was struck by the right idea.

19...♔f8!! *(D)*

Of course! The king overprotects the e7-square, thus making ...♕b8 followed by ...e6 possible. The position remains complicated, but Black has a clear plan now.

20 ♗xc4?!

I imagine that my long thought and the desperate expression on my face induced in my opponent, one of Romania's most dangerous attacking players, the idea that victory was not far off. Apparently, he didn't have the power to adapt himself to the new situation after 19...♔f8. The plan based on ♗xc4 followed by f4-f5

W

would be correct if Black were reduced to passivity, but this is not the case any more.

The immediate 20 f4?! allows 20...♖xd5! 21 exd5 ♘e3 22 ♕f3 ♗xd4! (safer than 22...♘xd1 23 f5 with an attack) 23 ♖xd4 ♘f5 when White's dark-squared bishop is more of a tall pawn.

One or two years later, I heard some rumours that Dan had found a refutation of 19...♔f8. I wasn't very convinced about this, but didn't try to check the position again, since in the meanwhile I had switched to the Pirc. However, Dan's next experience with this position wasn't much of a success either, which suggests that the king move, the fruit of a whole desperate hour of thought, was entirely sound: 20 ♘f5! ♗xf5! (20...gxf5 is too risky in view of 21 ♖hg1 threatening ♗h6) 21 exf5 ♕a8!? 22 fxg6 (White should probably take on e7 with one of his pieces) 22...♖xd5 23 gxf7 ♔xf7 24 ♕g4 ♘f6 25 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 26 ♗xc4 bxc4 27 ♕xc4 e6 28 ♖dg1 ♕b8 29 c3 ♖d2 0-1 Vasiesiu-Kosanović, Bucharest 1997.

20...bxc4 21 c3

The tempo spent on this prophylactic move will prove decisive, but after 21 f4 c3! 22 f5 (or 22 ♘xc3 ♕b6 and Black's attack looks unstoppable) 22...♖xd5! 23 exd5 ♕b6 Black has excellent play anyway.

21...♕b8 22 f4 e6 23 ♘e3 ♕b7!

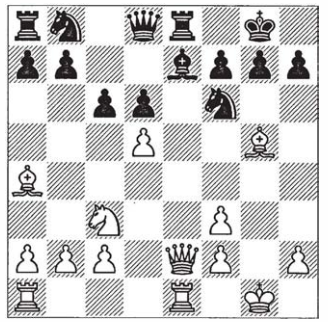
Black has achieved an ideal regrouping. From b7, the queen puts pressure on both e4 and b2.

24 ♘g4 e5 25 fxe5 dxe5 26 ♘e2 ♖b8 27 ♗c1 ♖b5 28 ♖d2 ♗xg4 29 ♕xg4 ♘f6 0-1

White's resignation was slightly premature, but he will lose the e4-pawn without any compensation.

It is curious that in his youth Steinitz himself failed to find a similar solution to his problems:

B



Anderssen – Steinitz
London 1862

White's advantage in development is obvious. Black's main hopes are connected with the weakened enemy kingside, which would considerably limit White's winning chances in certain positions, including many cases where he wins a pawn.

There are, however, more concrete problems to solve now, caused by the pins along the e-file and the a4-e8 and h4-d8 diagonals.

In his youth, Steinitz was quite different from the image he left behind as a world champion and outstanding writer (see also the game Steinitz-Hamppe from the introduction). Here he adopted a radical solution, which failed tactically.

14...b5?!

14...♗f8? is not possible owing to 15 ♗xf6!, winning, but a more mature Steinitz would have probably used his king to defend the e7- and e8-squares: 14...♔f8. The most unpleasant reaction to Black's threat to move the king's knight away and cause major simplifications is 15 ♕d3! attacking the weakened h7-square, but once again the king would prove himself a useful defensive piece: 15...♔g8. Black is still far from equality, but at least he has managed to prevent his position from deteriorating. It is not easy for White to increase the pressure; for instance:

a) 16 ♖e3 h6 (16...b5? is, just as in the game, premature: 17 dxc6! bxa4 18 ♗xf6 gxf6

19 ♕c4 and Black seems to be in trouble) 17 ♗h4 ♘fd7 and the worst for Black has already passed; for instance, 18 ♗xe7?! ♖xe7 19 dxc6?! ♘xc6 20 ♕xd6 ♖xe3 21 fxe3 ♕g5+ with excellent compensation for the pawn.

b) The more natural move 16 ♖ad1 might be better. Then Black should probably play 16...h6 17 ♗h4 a6 overprotecting the b5-square in order to threaten 18...b5 with the idea of 19 dxc6 ♘xc6 or 19 ♗b3 c5. White probably has nothing better than 18 dxc6 ♘xc6, when Black's position looks acceptable.

It is curious that the move 14...♔f8 escaped the attention of the annotators, including Steinitz.

15 ♗xf6 gxf6 16 dxc6!

An elegant move, typical for Anderssen.

16...bxa4 17 c7! ♕d7

Black has to return the material. Equally bad is 17...♕xc7 18 ♘d5 ♕d8 19 ♘xe7+ ♔f8 20 ♕e4!.

18 cxb8♕ ♖axb8 19 ♘d5

White's better pawn-structure and his mighty knight guarantee him a clear advantage.

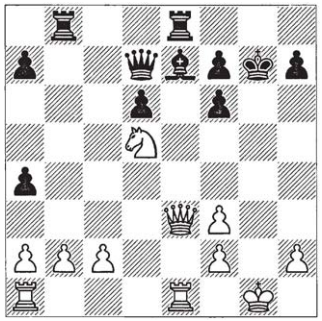
19...♔f8

Ironically, Steinitz is forced to play this move anyway, but under much less favourable circumstances. Instead, 19...♖b7 loses to 20 ♘xf6+.

20 ♕e3! ♔g7!? *(D)*

The control of the h6-square is of vital importance and the king was the only piece available for this task. This king's movements back and forth resemble the line 14...♔f8 15 ♕d3 ♔g8, but shouldn't have saved Black in this concrete situation. 20...♖b7?? loses in a similar way as on the previous move: 21 ♕h6+ ♔g8 22 ♖xe7! ♖xe7 23 ♘xf6+.

W

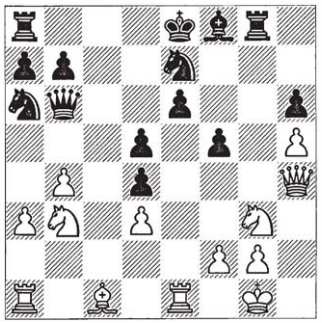


Exercise 4.1

Can White simply win a piece now?

The following game is a more spectacular illustration of the same theme: in order to cover important squares, the king advances to the centre of the board.

B



Mnatsakanian – Kholmov
USSR Cht (Tashkent) 1960

White has sacrificed a pawn in the opening, in return for better development. None of the black pieces are active, while his central mass of pawns looks more like an object for attack. ♕f6, ♗f4 and ♗b2 are just a few of the immediate threats.

18...♔f7!

The king defends the squares f6 and e6, leaving the dangerous e-file, while the g-file remains open for a counterattack. What more could we ask from a single move? By comparison, the more natural 18...♗g7 interferes with the g8-rook and leaves the e-file without sufficient defence; for instance: 19 ♗b2 e5 20 ♗xd4 ♗f6!? 21 ♕h3 exd4 22 ♘xf5 with a strong attack.

19 ♗b2

Kholmov intended to answer 19 ♕xd4 with 19...♗g7 20 ♕xb6 axb6 21 ♖b1 ♘c7, when his minor pieces would be ideally placed from the point of view of the fight for the crucial squares e5 and d4 (...♘b5 and ...♘c6 could be the next moves).

19...♖g4 20 ♕h3

White has been temporarily pushed back, but he threatens f3, when the d4-pawn would fall.

20...♗g7!

This move, involving an exchange sacrifice, is the only way to keep the central pawns together. Otherwise:

a) 20...♘c6?! is the other way to place the e5- and d4-squares under control. However, the interference of the sixth rank leaves the black queen out of play and allows tactical solutions: 21 ♖xe6! (Kholmov gives 21 ♘xf5 exf5 22 ♕f3 ♘e7 23 ♖xe7+ ♔xe7 24 ♖e1+, which also looks quite promising) 21...♔xe6 22 ♘xf5 ♖g5 (after 22...♔xf5 23 f3 White gets most of the material back, while keeping the attack) 23 ♘bxd4+ and the king cannot escape the combined attack of all White's pieces; for instance, 23...♔f7 24 ♘xh6+!.

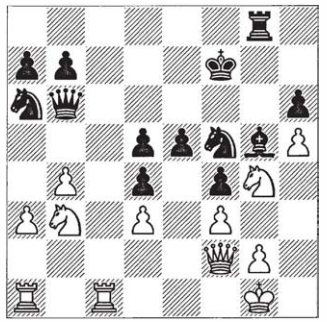
b) Kholmov also signals that 20...♘xb4 21 axb4 ♕xb4 is a premature manifestation of activity, but fails to mention the most direct refutation: 22 ♖xe6! (22 f3 ♖g8 23 ♘xd4 ♕xb2 24 ♘xe6) 22...♔xe6 23 ♘xf5 ♔xf5 24 ♘xd4+ ♔f6 25 ♕f3+! ♔g5 and now the calm 26 ♖b1 leaves Black with huge problems.

21 f3 ♖g5 22 ♗c1 ♗f6 23 ♗xg5 ♗xg5 24 ♘f1 ♖c8 25 ♕g3 f4

This is the only way to maintain the elasticity of the central structure; worse is 25...♖c3 26 f4 ♗f6 27 ♘fd2 ♕b5 28 ♘c1 followed by ♘f3 (Kholmov).

26 ♕f2 ♘f5 27 ♖ec1 ♖g8 28 ♘h2 e5 29 ♘g4 *(D)*

B



Black has managed to win space in the centre and has an excellent outpost for his knight on e3. However, he faces the concrete problem of defending the pawns on e5 and (in view of ♘c5 and ♕a2) d5.

29...♔e6!

It's again the king who fulfils this defensive task! With so many pieces on the board, e6 is not a very customary square for a king, but we can easily convince ourselves that other solutions aren't satisfactory: 29...♕d6? is simply bad in view of 30 b5, when White will penetrate via the c-file; 29...♖e8 not only gives up the pressure on the g-file, but also fails to defend d5 properly: 30 ♘c5 ♘xc5 31 ♖xc5 ♘e3 32 ♕a2!.

30 ♖ab1

Opening the b-file is possibly not the best plan but after 30 ♘c5+ ♘xc5 31 ♖xc5 ♘e3 (not 31...♗e7? because of 32 ♖xd5!) the position is rather unclear anyway.

30...♗e7 31 ♘c5+ ♗xc5 32 bxc5 ♕c6 33 ♕b2 ♖g7 34 ♕b5

This looks like a natural plan, because the black queen is safely defending the queenside. On the other hand, Black's king will be much better prepared for the endgame than White's.

34...♘e3 35 ♕xc6+ bxc6 36 ♔f2 e4 37 ♖b3 ♖xg4!

A second and very deep exchange sacrifice. Black plans to win the c5-pawn and launch a central avalanche.

38 fxg4 ♘xg4+ 39 ♔e2 ♘e5 40 ♖b7 ♘xd3

Black later won this not entirely clear but highly interesting position.

In the next remarkable game, a curious king manoeuvre has several purposes: evacuating the danger zone, improving coordination, and fighting against the undesired intruders...

B

Kasparov – Petrosian
Tilburg 1981

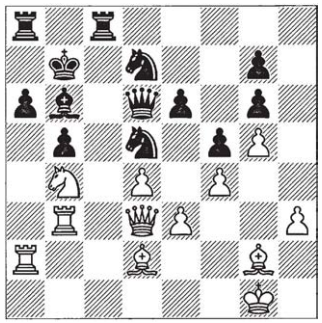
In spite of his extra pawn and apparently solid position, Black is under serious pressure along the a- and b-files and the long diagonal. All White's pieces are perfectly coordinated, which cannot be said about Black. For instance, the queen can do little for the king from the remote e7-square. However, if the mountain cannot come to Mohammed...

32...♔b7!

Kasparov attaches two exclamation marks to this move ("for the courage of the king") and a question mark ("for probably not being the strongest move"). As further analysis will prove, he could have spared the '?'. Garry points out that 32...bxc4? loses to 33 ♖xa6+!, while the more natural 32...♗d6 allows White a clear advantage: 33 ♖xb5! ♖xb5 34 ♘xd6 ♕xd6 35 ♕xb5. His comments on 32...♔b7 (!!?) claim in an indirect way that this last line is safer for Black than the game.

33 ♗b4

'?' according to Kasparov. He recommends 33 ♘a3 threatening either to sacrifice on b5 or to put more pressure on d5 with ♘c2-b4, depending on Black's reaction. After 33...♗b6 (33...♘7b6 allows a decisive attack: 34 ♘xb5 axb5 35 ♕xb5 {with the threat of 36 ♗xd5+ exd5 37 ♕xd5+} 35...♖d8 36 ♗b4! ♕e8 37 ♕a6+ ♔c6 38 ♗c5 ♔d7 39 ♗f1! and White wins – Kasparov) 34 ♘c2 ♖a8 35 ♘b4 ♕d6 *(D)* and now:



a) Kasparov gave 36 e4 as leading to a decisive advantage for White, but after 36...♘c5!! (Kasparov only gave 36...fxe4 37 ♕xe4 ♖a7 38 ♕xg6 ♗xd4+ 39 ♔h1 ♘7b6 40 f5!, winning for White) White should settle for the draw by perpetual check: 37 dxc5 ♕xc5+ 38 ♔h2 ♕g1+ 39 ♔g3 ♕f2+.

Black's strong reply was easy to overlook in the pre-computer era, but if White spends a tempo on prophylaxis, Black gets the necessary tempo to regroup. For instance:

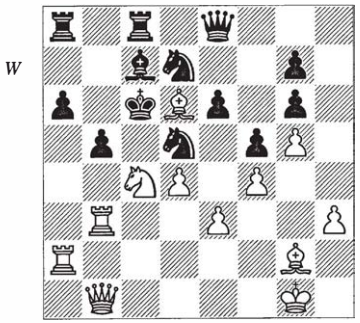
b) 36 ♖ba3 ♘b8 37 ♕b3 ♖c4 and now attacking the rook with 38 ♘xd5?! exd5 39 ♗f1 would hardly be a good idea, especially against Petrosian (see also Chapter 11, Exchange Sacrifices): 39...♘c6! 40 ♗xc4 dxc4 with excellent compensation on light squares.

c) 36 ♔h1 ♘b8 37 e4 fxe4 38 ♕xe4 ♘c6! and the position is not at all clear.

33...♕e8!

The best location for the queen, defending important squares such as g6, e6 and (indirectly) b5.

34 ♗d6 ♖a8 35 ♕b1 ♔c6! *(D)*



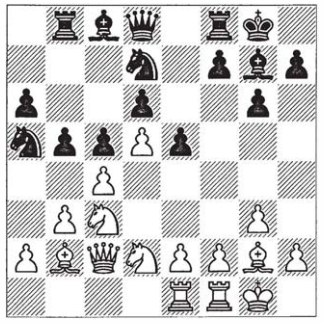
This second king move to the centre received an even better evaluation from Kasparov than 32...♔b7, in the sense that he skipped the question mark. The king not only prepares for an eventual escape to the other wing, but also leaves the white minor pieces hanging. Demoralized by such an unexpected course of events, Kasparov goes down quickly.

36 ♖ba3?

Kasparov gives 36 ♗xc7 when the main line runs 36...bxc4 37 ♖b7 ♖xc7 38 ♖xa6+ ♖xa6 39 ♕b5+ ♔d6 40 ♕xa6+ ♔e7 41 ♗xd5 ♖xb7 42 ♗xb7 ♕b8 43 ♔f2 with a more or less equal endgame.

36...bxc4 37 ♖xa6+ ♖xa6 38 ♖xa6+ ♗b6 39 ♗c5 ♕d8 40 ♕a1 ♘xc5 41 dxc5 ♔xc5 42 ♖a4 0-1

There are, however, cases where the king cannot do much for the defence; on the contrary, its presence might interfere with the action of its own pieces besides the permanent source of danger that its presence creates. In such situations, the wisest solution is to leave the theatre of action, if allowed by the circumstances, of course. We can usually see such scenarios in closed positions, where walking from one wing to the other is physically possible.



Marin – Shirov
Spanish Cht (Cala Galdana) 2001

14 ♘d1

White prepares f4. In case of ...exf4, gxf4, White would exchange bishops, put the queen on c3 to paralyse the black queen (because of the hanging a5-knight) and bring the knight to d3 via f2 or b2, thus covering practically all the important squares on the b-file. Black would be left without any counterplay, while White could choose between opening the position with e4 or playing on the b-file.

14...f5 15 f4 e4!

White was threatening to play e4 himself, after which he would practically be playing with an extra piece on the kingside. Shirov wisely decides to keep the closed character of the position.

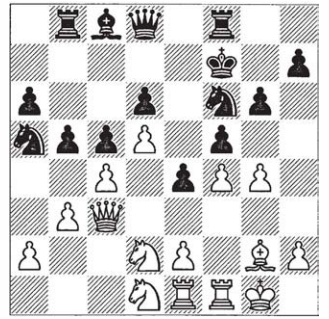
16 ♗xg7 ♔xg7 17 ♕c3+ ♔f7!

17...♘f6 18 g4 ♔f7 is another possible move-order, but the idea of moving the king to f7 (instead of the more obvious ...♔g8) is very deep indeed. The king starts a long trip to c7, which is probably its safest square. If White decided to open the g-file, then the black rook could immediately occupy it. Thinking back now, I believe that this is the move that actually deviates from my home preparation on this line, several years before the game took place. In a certain sense, it was also the main reason for White's defeat.

18 g4

If White managed to play g5 before ...♘f6, both black knights would find themselves limited to just a few bad squares. White could then choose the right moment for a piece sacrifice on e4. Shirov, of course, doesn't allow this.

18...♘f6 *(D)*



By this moment, I had a considerable advantage on the clock and no reason at all to complain about the position. Nevertheless, I felt that I was at a crossroads: White has to decide what plan to choose. At some moment, Black may safely defend the e4-pawn, when White would have either to take on f5 or to block the position with g5. In the latter case, White would be not risking anything, of course, but the only chance to play for a win would be a piece sacrifice for two pawns on e4.

There is also the problem of the e3-square: which piece should be installed there? The queen or the knight? Or should White simply play e3 at some point, so that the bishop can be brought to e2?

To navigate among all these possibilities it is necessary either to have a very good understanding of blocked positions in general or to have previously studied with attention this particular position.

Looking back, I can say that neither of these was the case. The 'safest' thing would have probably been to play g5 as soon as possible

and, moving the pieces here and there without any real idea and wait for a draw offer. However, I hardly considered such an option: I don't often play games against top-class players...

19 ♘f2

19 ♘e3 is more natural. Shirov intended to react with 19...b4 (freeing his queen from the trouble of defending the a5-knight; Black had no chances of counterplay on the b-file: 19...♕b6 20 ♖b1!) 20 ♕c2 ♕e7 (...fxg4 is already a threat, as ♘xe4 would lose a piece after taking and ...♖e8) 21 gxf5 (the position is rather drawish after 21 g5 ♘h5; the knight is quite useful here: it safely defends against one of White's possible threats: h4-h5) 21...♗xf5! (Shirov's initial suggestion 21...gxf5? is bad in view of 22 ♗h3!) 22 ♔h1 (Black defends well after 22 ♘xf5 gxf5 23 ♗h3 ♖g8+ 24 ♔h1 ♘g4, which is one of the situations where the strength of ...♔f7 becomes obvious) 22...♖be8 (22...♗d7, planning ...♖be8 and ...♘b7, is also possible since the capture on e4 would lose a piece to a later ...♖be8) 23 ♖g1 and, precisely at the moment when White is threatening to take on f5, Black plays 23...♗d7!. It is hard to prove an advantage for White here, although Black still has problems arranging his pieces: the f7-square (needed for the manoeuvre ...♘b7-d8-f7) is occupied by the king, whose route to the queenside is cut off by his own pieces.

19...b4

Shirov correctly assesses that there would be no future for him anyway on the b-file. By advancing this pawn at a moment when the queen has to guard the e3-square, he creates the potential threat of occupying the long diagonal with his own queen. This could become unpleasant, in conjunction with the slow attack ...♘b7, ...a5-a4, ...♘a5, ...♖a8.

20 ♕g3

More cautious is 20 ♕e3 (not taking the queen too far from the queenside) 20...♘b7 21 g5 ♘h5 22 ♖a1 a5 23 ♖fd1 followed by ♘f1-g3 and, although both sides still have some ideas, the most probable outcome is a draw.

20...♕e7 21 e3 ♘b7 22 ♕h4

The battle suddenly becomes very tense. White is burning all his bridges (for instance, 21 e3 cut off the retreat for the white queen).

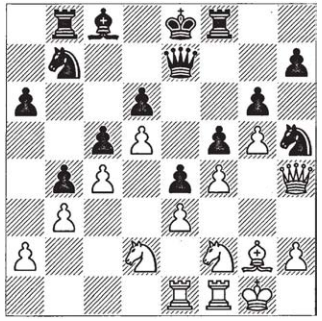
22...♔e8!

Black evacuates the king and creates the threat of ...♘xd5. The immediate 22...♘xd5? is impossible because of 23 ♕xh7+.

23 g5 ♘h5 *(D)*

Besides the general plan (...♔d8-c7, ...♕g7, ...a5-a4, ...♘a5, attacking the b3-pawn) Black also threatens ...h6 and ...hxg5, after which he would get the e5-square for the b7-knight! Less accurate is 23...♘d7 24 ♕h6 ♘d8 25 h4 with the initiative.

W



24 ♘dxe4?!

When I played 23 g5 I knew that I would sacrifice a knight on e4 next move. One of the most common and, at the same time, difficult problems in chess is to choose which of the two rooks to put on a certain open line. This, of course, never happens with bishops, as they act on different diagonals, but sometimes a decision should be made about which of the knights to place on a strong square (in such cases, one of them might become 'superfluous' and should actually be exchanged, if possible).

Less common is the case when you have to decide which knight to sacrifice, but here we have such an instance. My first intention was actually 24 ♘fxe4! fxe4 25 ♗xe4. Optically speaking, this is logical enough: the knight from f2 was covering the f-file and keeping the f1-rook out of play. But when I tried to figure out how the game would continue, I only considered the plan of ♗f3xh5, followed by e4. From this perspective, I didn't like my knight's position on d2: once the black queen occupies the long diagonal, the knight would feel rather unstable.

What I didn't really sense was that in this position White's advantage in development and his ideally placed pieces create a very serious threat: the f5 advance, without any further preparation. Black has several moves at his disposal, but White's initiative looks very strong in each case:

a) 25...♗f5 only helps White to set both his central pawns in motion: 26 ♗xf5 ♖xf5 27 e4 ♖f8 28 e5 ♔d8 29 f5! and it is hard to believe that Black can resist.

b) 25...♕f7, defending the knight on h5, doesn't stop f5 at all: 26 f5! gxf5 (26...♗xf5 27 ♗xf5 gxf5 28 e4 f4 29 e5 dxe5? 30 ♘f3! winning at least the h5-knight) 27 ♗xf5! ♗xf5 28 e4 ♔d7 29 exf5 followed by ♖e6 and ♘e4.

c) 25...♔d8 (probably the best defence) 26 f5! gxf5 27 ♕xh5 fxe4 28 ♖xf8+ ♕xf8. White has exchanged some of the few developed black pieces and will probably play with three pawns versus a bishop; the black knight is still a problem. Play might continue 29 ♖f1 (29 ♕xh7 ♕e7 30 ♕xe7+ ♔xe7 31 ♘xe4 might also be playable) 29...♕g8 30 ♖f7 ♗d7 31 ♖xh7 ♔c7 32 ♘xe4 and White must be clearly better, even though the position remains rather complicated.

I mentioned that cases when a choice has to be made about which knight to sacrifice are rather rare. My previous experience with it was the game Skembris-Marin, mentioned in Chapter 1.

24...fxe4 25 ♗xe4 ♔d8 26 ♗f3 *(D)*

B

Even so, White has good compensation.

26...♔c7

Black is consistent. As Shirov himself pointed out, 26...h6 27 ♗xh5 hxg5 28 fxg5 ♖h8?! is risky: 29 ♕f4 ♖xh5 30 h4 and the black pieces are uncoordinated.

27 ♗xh5 gxh5 28 ♕xh5 ♗d7

The position is materially balanced and the white centre looks quite impressive. However, the black king occupies the safest square on the whole board, while it is quite difficult to find an ideal square for the white king. On b1, it would be exposed to ...a5-a4, while on the kingside it interferes with the plan of advancing the pawn-mass.

29 ♘h1

Shirov said that he hadn't foreseen this move. White improves the position of the knight and, implicitly, of the f1-rook. However, a less time-consuming and possibly better way to do this is 29 ♘g4, when White shouldn't be worse.

29...♕g7 30 ♘g3 a5

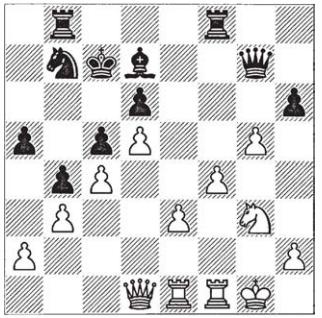
This move had a strong psychological effect: Shirov prepares counterplay on the queenside, which caused me to hesitate.

31 ♕d1?

By this point I had become a bit short of time. I retreated the queen hoping to neutralize the pressure along the diagonal. The defects of this move will become clear rather soon. White should continue 31 e4, when Shirov intended 31...♖be8 (I mainly considered 31...♕d4+ but 32 ♔h1! is OK for White; I was somehow intimidated by 32 ♔g2? ♖xf4! 33 ♖xf4 ♕d2+, when White cannot defend both rooks at the same time). After 32 ♖f2 a4 the position is very difficult to assess. White has many possible plans (the simplest is f5-f6) but Black retains counterplay in all lines.

31...h6! *(D)*

W



As Nimzowitsch pointed out, an unsupported pawn majority (or formation) can become the

object of an attack and a potential weakness. The white king also feels a strong discomfort.

32 gxh6 ♕xh6 33 ♕d2 ♖f7!

I completely missed this simple plan. By putting pressure on the f-pawn, Black prevents e5. I suddenly understood that the game was practically over, but still enjoyed Shirov's precise execution.

34 ♖f2 ♖bf8 35 e4 ♕h4

I was still hoping for 35...♖xf4? 36 ♖ef1 ♗h3 37 ♖xf4 ♗xf1 after which White would win with 38 ♖f7+!.

36 f5 ♖g7

Pinning the g3-knight is a good idea. The general plan is, of course, to transfer the knight from b7 to e5, but Shirov makes a few harassing moves, disorganizing my position even more.

37 ♕b2

Threatening e5.

37...♖e7

Indirectly attacking the e1-rook.

38 ♖ee2

White doesn't have time for the blockading move 38 a4 (which would rule out ...a4) in view of the elegant 38...♖xf5! (but not 38...♗xf5?, which loses to 39 ♖ef1!) using a double pin: 39 ♘xf5 ♗xf5.

38...♖g8

Attacking the e4-pawn.

39 ♖g2 ♖e5

Safely blockading the pawn.

40 a4

Not really necessary, as Black had better plans than ...a4, but White has no hope anyway.

40...♘d8 41 ♖e3 ♘f7 42 ♕e2 ♖g4

The start of the invasion. Once the e4-pawn falls, White's position will collapse.

43 ♕c2 ♘g5 44 ♖ge2 ♖f4

Threatening ...♘f3-d4.

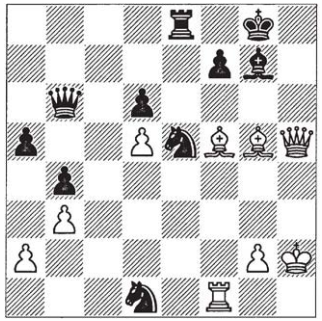
45 ♔h1 ♗e8

Black plans ...♗h5, after which White would have to exchange his knight for the bishop, thus leaving the e-pawn without sufficient defence. Therefore, I resigned.

0-1

In the previous game, the king escaped to a safe but 'neutral' position. This is equivalent to hiding the jewels in the safe when you feel the thieves approaching. However, there is a more interesting situation when the chased king runs to an active position, targeting the weak spot in the opponent's camp: the enemy king.

W



Giurumia – Co. Ionescu
Romanian Cht (Eforie Nord) 1984

White has a powerful position. The first thing that attracts our attention is the exposed situation of the black king; it probably induced in Giurumia the dangerous thought that a pleasant cat-and-mouse game lay ahead. This sweet illusion prevented him from paying sufficient attention to such details as the not totally safe position of his own king and Black's good control of the dark squares, which require from White a certain accuracy. The game continued:

34 ♕h7+ ♔f8 35 ♗h6 ♗xh6 36 ♕xh6+ ♔e7 37 ♕g5+?!

It is clear that the king has to be sent back to f8 before taking on d1, but which is the best square for the queen? By choosing the check on g5, White wanted to discourage 37...f6, because of the possibility of 38 ♕g7+, but did not pay attention to another detail: possible counterplay involving the black queen.

It is better to place the f2-square under control with 37 ♕h4+; for instance, 37...♔f8 (37...f6 is strongly met by 38 ♗e6! {White probably missed this *zwischenzug*} 38...♖f8 39 ♖xd1 ♕e3 40 ♖e1 followed by ♕h7+) 38 ♖xd1 ♕e3 39 ♖f1. White has a slow plan of improving his position with ♗e6, ♖f4, etc., while his own king feels more comfortable than in the game.

37...♔f8

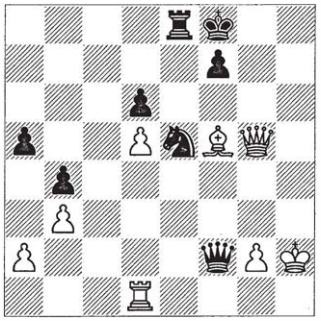
Ironically, 37...f6 is in fact playable, just as at a later moment of the game: 38 ♕g7+ ♘f7 39 ♖xd1 ♕f2.

38 ♕h6+ ♔e7 39 ♕g5+ ♔f8 40 ♖xd1

It would be safer to agree to a draw, but such decisions are not easy to make on the 40th move.

40...♕f2! *(D)*

W



With this simple move, Black not only creates the threat of ...♘f3+ and limits the white king to the h-file, but also takes the important attacking squares e1 and f1 away from the white rook.

41 ♕h6+?!

Under no circumstances should Black's king have been allowed to escape from f8. It seems that White had by now decided to make a draw, but didn't choose the right way. 41 ♔h1 is strongly met by 41...♘f3, when the least Black can achieve is a more pleasant endgame after a later ...♕h4+. White should have removed his king from the dangerous first two ranks with 41 ♔h3!, when it is impossible for Black to make progress. A possible continuation is 41...♘f3 42 gxf3! ♕xf3+ 43 ♔h4 ♕xd1 44 ♕h6+ with a draw by perpetual check.

41...♔e7 42 ♕g5+ f6! 43 ♕g7+ ♘f7

White has managed to drive the knight to a more passive position, but this is a temporary achievement. The freedom of the black king has, however, a permanent character, just as the strangled position of his rival on h2.

44 ♗h3 ♖h8 45 ♕g4 f5 46 ♕c4?

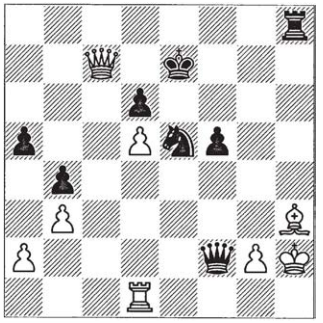
The decisive mistake; relatively better is 46 ♕g3 with an inferior endgame.

46...♘e5! 47 ♕c7+ *(D)*

47...♔f6!!

Suddenly, the roles have changed dramatically in the cat-and-mouse game. The black king now takes on the feline's part, while the

B



mouse's role is assigned to its white counterpart. As for the ex-cat (the white queen), it has become a mere spectator. For the moment, the threat is ...♘g4+ followed by ...♖xh3+.

48 ♕xd6+ ♔g5 49 ♔h1

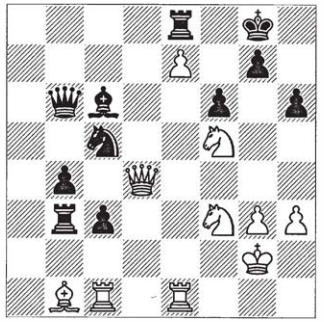
49 ♕xe5 allows the elegant 49...♖xh3+ 50 ♔xh3 ♕h4#, while after 49 ♕e7+ ♔f4 50 ♕d6 (pinning the knight) the mate is delivered on g3: 50...♖xh3+ 51 ♔xh3 ♕g3#.

49...♖xh3+ 50 gxh3 ♕f3+

A few moves later White resigned.

In the next example, the theme was amplified by the initially greater distance between the kings and by the fact that the board was still full of pieces.

B



Portisch – Benjamin
Szirak IZ 1987

The position is very tense, with both kings in rather unsafe positions. Black had just sacrificed a piece and now decided to win it back:

42...♗xf3+ 43 ♔xf3 c2+

Black hoped to continue chasing the king in conditions of equal material. However...

44 ♔g4!?

After this unexpected move, Black didn't manage to readjust his plans.

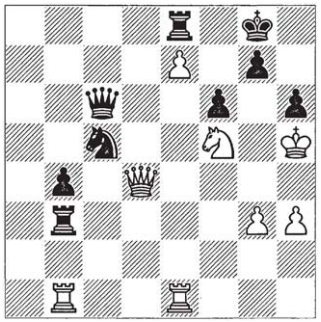
44 ♔f2? is obviously bad due to 44...♘d3+, but Benjamin might have expected the more natural 44 ♔g2 when Black has a certain initiative: 44...cxb1♕ 45 ♖xb1 (45 ♕d5+ ♔h7 46 ♖xb1 ♘d3 doesn't change the picture: White's king is exposed) 45...♕c6+ 46 ♔g1 ♖xb1 (46...♘d3!? is also interesting) 47 ♖xb1 ♘e6 48 ♕xb4 ♘g5. In principle, White should be able to hold, but Black's game is easier.

44...♕c6

Portisch considers that 44...cxb1♕ 45 ♕d5+ intending ♖xb1 and ♕f7' is winning for White. This would be true if Black had to allow ♕f7 at all, but after the calm 45...♘e6! White has nothing better than to force a draw: 46 ♖xb1 ♖xb1 47 ♖xe6 (with the king on g2, 47 ♖xb1 would offer White an advantage, but in this situation Black can play 47...g6 48 ♘xh6+ ♔g7 and the king blocks an important square for the knight) 47...♖d1! (an important *zwischenzug*, saving the day; if White had checked on c4 instead of d5, then 47...♖c1 would have led to the same final position) 48 ♕e4 ♕c5 49 ♘xh6+! ♔h8! 50 ♘f7+ and neither player can avoid the perpetual check.

45 ♔h5 cxb1♕ 46 ♖xb1 *(D)*

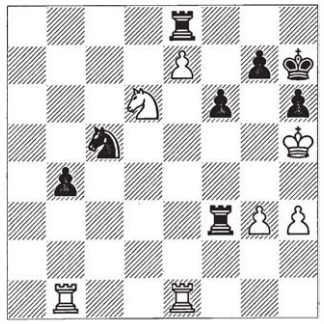
B



46...♕f3+?

A typical mistake: hypnotized by the advanced position of the white king, Black tries to take immediate advantage of it, but only manages to help the king reach a better square. It is true that 46...♖xb1? 47 ♕g4 g5 48 ♕c4+ gives White an irresistible attack. However, 46...♔h7! is better, denying the enemy access to g6. After 47 ♕g4 Black has the unexpected resource 47...♕f3! highlighted by Graham Burgess (after 47...g5? 48 ♖xb3 ♘xb3 49 ♘xh6 ♕d5 {Black has to defend the b1-h7 diagonal} 50 ♕f5+! the white pawn promotes) 48 ♕xf3 (against 48 ♖xb3 Black has the intermediate 48...g6+! taking advantage of the pin and planning to meet 49 ♔h4 with 49...♕xb3) 48...♖xf3 49 ♘d6 *(D)*.

B

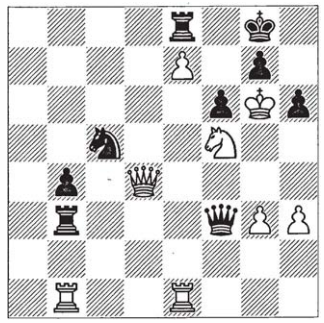


Benjamin is not to blame for having rejected this position: it does look as if White ought to be winning. However, after 49...g6+ 50 ♔h4 h5! Black puts the white king in a dangerous mating-net. Such are the risks of making long trips with the king, but White seems still to be able to draw with precise play: 51 ♖xb4 (since neither 51 ♘xe8? ♔h6!, with the terrible threat of ...g5#, nor 51 g4? g5+ 52 ♔xh5 ♖xh3# is possible for White, he must play only with his rooks for the next few moves) 51...♘d3 52 ♖be4 ♘xe1 53 ♖xe1 ♔h6! 54 ♘f7+ ♔g7 (Black clears the h-file without loss of time for his rook; he can also choose different move-orders to reach this position, by playing ...♔h6 earlier) 55 ♘d6 (White has apparently solved his problems, but Black still has ideas) 55...♖h8! (threatening mate in one) 56 e8♘+ (obviously forced) 56...♔f8 (56...♔h7? is bad because of 57 ♖e7+) 57 ♘xf6 (finally eliminating the mating threat, although at a very high price) 57...♖xf6 58 ♖e8+ ♔g7 59 ♖xh8 ♔xh8 60 ♘e4. In spite of his material disadvantage, White seems to be able to hold a draw. For instance: 60...♖a6 61 g4 ♔g7 62 ♘g5 ♔f6 63 ♘f3 ♖a3 64 ♔g3 h4+ (64...hxg4 65 hxg4 g5 leads to a theoretical drawish position) 65 ♔f2 g5 66 ♔e2 ♖a5 67 ♔f2 ♔e6 68 ♔e2 ♖d5 (this looks the best try to activate the king) 69 ♔e3 ♔d6 70 ♔e4 ♔c5 71 ♘e5 and White's activity should be enough to keep the balance.

The outcome of this ending might be crucial for the final evaluation of the move 44 ♔g4. Even if from an objective point of view 44 ♔g2 exposes White to less danger, 44 ♔g4 was a better practical decision: how many human players would have found the mating-net after the exchange of queens, especially under time-pressure?

47 ♔g6 *(D)*

B



47...♖d3

Black pins his last hopes on a trick based on the unusual position of the white king. 47...♖xb1 loses immediately to 48 ♕c4+ followed by ♕f7, while after 47...♖c3 48 ♖xb4 White's domination takes on a decisive character. The back-rank threats such as ♖b8 are impossible to parry.

48 ♕xc5 ♖d5 49 ♖f1!

A very important *zwischenzug*, similar to 47...♖d1 in the note to Black's 44th move. If White moves the queen off the fifth rank (by 49 ♕c2 or 49 ♕c8, in order to keep the knight defended), Black can mate in two starting with 49...♕xg3+, as mentioned by Portisch.

49...♖xf5 50 ♕xf5 ♕xg3+ 51 ♔h5 ♖xe7 52 ♖g1

White has a decisive material advantage and the prospect of bringing the queen's rook into a decisive attack with tempo. Black tried one more fifth-rank trick:

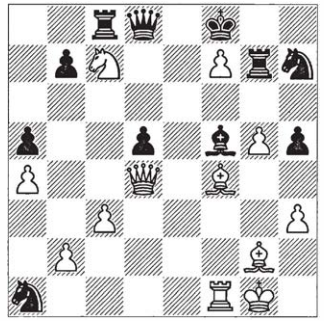
52...♕c3 53 ♖bc1 ♖e5 54 ♖xc3 ♖xf5+ 55 ♔g6! 1-0

In chess compositions, mates delivered in the centre of the board are considered to be the most elegant; it is not so easy to control all eight squares around the king with just a few pieces. In studies and problems, however, things are set up by the composer to make such a perfect co-ordination of the pieces possible.

In practical chess, matters are more complicated. It sometimes happens that a king runs for its life through the open centre of the board. In such cases, it is not always advisable for the attacking side to look only for a forced mate; winning some small amount of material or simplifying to a favourable endgame should also be considered.

The next game is a good illustration of the vivacity of the king, in spite of the apparently desperate situation. White centred his efforts on the errant black king. He was not able to deliver a mate but missed several ways of achieving an advantage in normal ways.

W



L. Vajda – Marin
Bucharest Ciocaltea mem 2001

In spite of his extra rook, Black is completely losing. His king is very exposed and the knight on a1 doesn't count too much for the moment.

24 g6?!

White invites Black's king to walk up the centre of the board, but this is certainly not the

simplest solution. If my young opponent, badly needing a win in order to make a GM norm, had foreseen the longevity of the black monarch, he would have looked for something else; for instance, 24 ♗e5! ♖xg5 25 ♖xf5 winning easily.

24...♖xg6 25 ♕h8+ ♔e7 26 ♕e5+ ♗e6 27 ♕xh5?!

It is more difficult to choose between two or more tempting continuations than between several bad ones. When the options are all grim, the method of elimination is usually helpful. Vajda couldn't find a forced win and he made a move based on general considerations: most of Black's pieces are hanging now. I was more afraid of the endgame arising after 27 ♘xe6! ♖xe6 28 ♗g5+ (28 ♕g7 also looks strong) 28...♘xg5 29 ♕xg5+ ♔f8 30 ♕g8+ ♔e7 31 f8♕+ ♕xf8 32 ♖xf8 ♖xf8 33 ♕g5+, when White should win without any problems. However, it is not easy to decide to simplify into an endgame at a moment when the attack looks so strong.

27...♗xf7 28 ♖e1+

There is nothing decisive for White after 28 ♕xh7 ♕g8 29 ♘xd5+ ♔d7.

28...♔d7 29 ♕f5+ ♔c6 *(D)*

W

30 ♘e6?!

White continues to play for an attack, at a moment when he should have been thinking about winning some material back with 30 ♕xf7. With all his pieces hanging, Black must go in for simplifications with 30...♖xg2+ (Vajda was afraid of 30...♕g8 failing to notice that after 31 ♕xd5+ ♕xd5 32 ♘xd5 most of Black's pieces are vulnerable, in conditions of relative material equality) 31 ♔xg2 ♕g8+ 32 ♕xg8 ♖xg8+ 33 ♔f3 ♘b3. If Black now managed to play ...♘c5, then he would get reasonable counterplay on the kingside, but after the precise 34 ♖e6+! he loses his coordination again. After the text-move, White is no longer winning.

30...♖xe6 31 ♖xe6+ ♗xe6 32 ♕xe6+ ♔c5

The king looks more exposed than ever. However, after the simplifications produced during the last few moves, Black can claim for the first time a 'real' material advantage: his knight on a1 is not so easy to capture now.

33 ♗e3+

The most probable result now is a draw by perpetual. White could have won the material back with 33 ♗xd5 ♕xd5 (forced, in view of the threat ♗e3#) 34 ♕xc8+ ♕c6 35 ♕f5+ ♔c4 36 ♕xh7 but Black seems to have reasonable compensation after 36...♔b3. A former target of White's attack, the king now threatens to eliminate the entire queenside. The knight would also come into play, combining with the queen, to harass the white king.

A more unpleasant move in Black's time-trouble would be 33 ♔h1!?, removing the king from a potentially exposed square and continuing to play for an attack.

33...♔c4 34 ♕g4+ d4?!

Pressed by time, I considered it necessary to spoil White's piece coordination, fearing that after 34...♔b3 35 ♕d1+ I would get mated. In fact, White only has a perpetual check: 35...♔xb2 (but not 35...♔a2? 36 ♗xd5+ ♔xb2 37 ♕c1#) 36 ♗c1+ (or 36 ♗xd5 ♖xc3 and again White has nothing better than a draw) 36...♔xc3 37 ♕d2+ ♔b3 38 ♗xd5+ ♔xa4 39 ♕d4+ ♔b5 40 ♕d3+ ♔a4 41 ♕e4+ ♔b5.

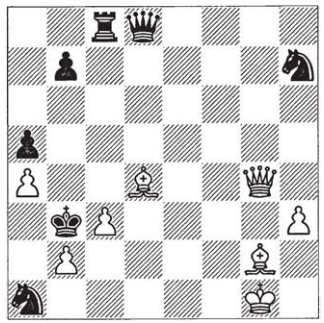
After the text-move, White has the advantage again.

35 ♗xd4

Vajda was tired by now and facing time-trouble too. Otherwise, he might have found a way to exploit the weaknesses created by Black's last move: that of the a2-g8 diagonal and of the e4-square: 35 ♕e6+! ♔d3 36 ♕e4+ ♔c4 37 ♕xb7 (threatening mate on b5) 37...♔d3 38 ♗xd4. White already has three pawns for the rook, and the black king is still under fire while his knights are exposed. White can play for a win without the least risk, since he would always have a perpetual.

35...♔b3 *(D)*

W



This square is almost as comfortable for the king as g6 was in the game Portisch-Benjamin.

36 ♕d1+ ♔a2

An incredible moment. In the initial position, the knight on a1 seemed to be doomed, or at least completely unable to give any support to the errant king. It happened the other way around: like in a famous Shakespearean scene, His Majesty gladly abandoned the wrecked kingdom for the sake of this knight.

37 ♗e4 ♘g5

The other knight also comes to life.

38 ♗b1+

Apparently, White was still playing for a win. 38 ♕b1+ ♔b3 39 ♕d1+ would have forced an immediate draw.

38...♔xb2 39 c4+ ♔a3 40 ♕c1+?!

This is risky. Wiser is 40 ♗c5+ ♔b2 41 ♗d4+ with a draw.

40...♔xa4 41 ♗c2+

It is curious that in this moment White offered a draw, right after having rejected several ways to take a perpetual.

41...♔b4 42 ♕d2+ ♔xc4 43 ♕d3+ ♔b4 44 ♕d2+ ♔b5 45 ♕d3+ ♔b4 46 ♕d2+ ♔b5 47 ♕d3+

Tired after such a hard defence, I decided not to push my luck:

47...♔b4

Black could try to play on with 47...♖c4 48 ♗a4+ ♔b4 49 ♗c5+! ♖xc5 50 ♕xd8 ♘xh3+ 51 ♔h2 ♔xa4 but the checks are not easy to avoid after 52 ♕d4+, when Black should take care not to lose the a1-knight at a moment when his other pieces would be impossible to coordinate.

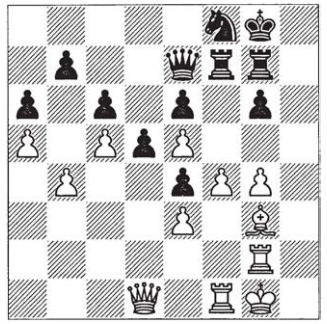
½-½

It is interesting that more than half of Black's moves from the fragment we have followed were made by the king, while the black queen did not make a single move during the whole game.

And David danced before the Lord with all his might (...) And (...) Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.
(2 SAMUEL 6; 14, 16)

Exercise 4.2

B

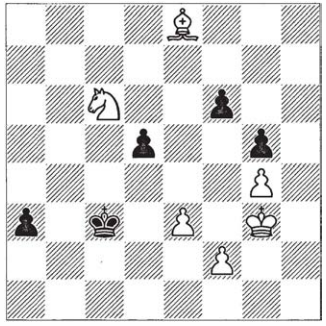


Alekhine – Euwe
Amsterdam (5) 1926

Black has a solid but passive position. White has a plan of strengthening the pressure at his disposal, based on ♕e1, ♗h4, etc. How would you defend?

5 Fortresses

The notion of a fortress is very revealing for the way people tend to consider chess as an abstract reflection of real life. Just as in medieval times, a small chess army can resist against a much stronger enemy by hiding within the 'walls' built with pawns and defended from the 'crenels' by the minor pieces. Strictly speaking, there is a significant difference compared to real life: the pawns are not inanimate stones, but an organic part of the army itself. Moreover, the enemy pawns can also form part of the fortress; two blocked pawn-chains ensure a double thickness of the walls. We shall see, however, that the similarities are more relevant than these formal differences.



Adianto – A. Mikhalevski
Biel 1998

There is no way to stop Black's a-pawn but White's compact structure enables him to set up a fortress.

1 ♘d4 a2 2 ♗f7 a1♕ 3 ♗xd5 ♕g1+ 4 ♗g2

White is completely out of danger: the black pieces cannot get close enough to create serious threats.

4...♔d3 5 ♘f5 ♔e2 6 ♘d4+ ♔d3 7 ♘f5 ♕c1 8 ♗f3 ♔d2 9 ♔g2 ♔e1 10 ♘d4 ♕b2 11 ♗e2 ♕b1 12 ♗f3 ½-½

Black's frustration is easy to imagine.

Then let them (...) flee into the mountains. Let he who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. Neither let he who is in the field return to take his clothes.
(MATTHEW 24; 16-18)

The boundary between a safe fortress and a losing position is sometimes hard to determine. The following analysis tries to help the reader form an idea about it. In the initial position, White should get his pieces to stable positions as soon as possible. Winning the f6-pawn with...

1 ♘e7

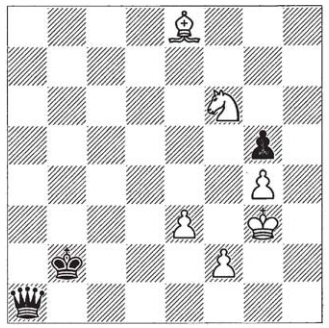
...is risky, because White loses coordination:

1...a2 2 ♘xd5+ ♔b2!

The king tries to avoid checks, in order to prevent his opponent from winning time to build the fortress. Mikhalevski gives only 2...♔d2 3 ♘xf6 a1♕ claiming a clear advantage for Black, but White's defensive resources are not exhausted: 4 ♘e4+ ♔d3 5 ♗g6 (Black should hurry now; otherwise White would play ♗f5 with a solid position) 5...♕g1+ 6 ♔f3 ♕h1+ 7 ♔g3 ♕h4+ 8 ♔f3 ♕h3+ 9 ♘g3+ ♔d2 (planning to attack the f2-pawn) 10 e4! (passive defence would lead to trouble: 10 ♗f5 ♔e1 11 ♗g6 ♕h2 12 ♘e4 ♕h1+ 13 ♔g3 ♔f1 when in view of the mating threat on g2, White is forced to abandon the fortress: 14 ♘xg5 ♕g2+ 15 ♔f4 ♕h2+!) 10...♕h8 (insisting with 10...♔e1 would lead to an immediate draw after 11 e5! ♕h2 12 e6 ♕xf2+ 13 ♔e4 ♕xg3 14 e7 ♕xg4+ 15 ♔e5 when the pawn is too strong) 11 e5! (White has to clear the e4-square in order to build the fortress again, this time with the king on a safer position) 11...♕xe5 12 ♗f5 ♕f4+ 13 ♔g2 ♔e1 14 ♘e4 and White is out of danger even if Black manages to pass him the right (i.e. obligation) to move: 15 ♔g1 ♕f3 16 ♔h2, and 16...♔f1? is impossible in view of 17 ♘d2+.

3 ♘xf6 a1♕ *(D)*

Compared to the game, White has won an unimportant pawn, but is short of one vital

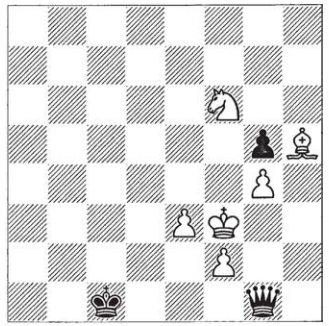


tempo to build an effective fortress. For instance:

4 ♗h5

Other attempts to coordinate the pieces also fail: 4 ♘e4 loses the knight to 4...♕g1+! followed by ...♕h1+, while 4 ♗f7 allows 4...♕a7 5 ♗h5 ♕e7 6 ♘e8 ♔c3 when the badly coordinated white army is helpless against the threat of ...♔d2-e2 and ...♕f8.

4...♕g1+! 5 ♔f3 ♔c1 *(D)*



6 ♘h7

Compared to a previous note, the bishop is worse placed on h5 and the counterplay with 6 e4 fails to 6...♕h2!.

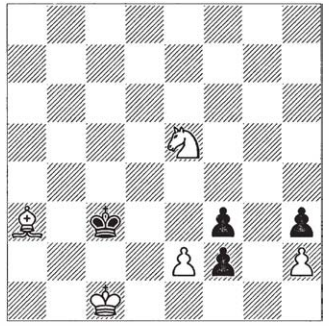
6...♕d1+ 7 ♔g3

7 ♔g2 ♕d5+ 8 ♔g1 avoids losing the knight, but leaves the king in trouble after 8...♔d2.

7...♕d6+ 8 ♔g2 ♕h6

Black wins the knight.

When we speak about a fortress, we usually have in mind the idea of 'not letting in' the enemy pieces. In the next example, White will not allow Black's queen to 'escape' from prison.



Troitsky
3rd Pr., Zadachy i Etiudy, 1928

White's position looks hopeless. His pieces are too uncoordinated to stop the f2-pawn. However, the exposed position of the black king allows an elegant solution:

1 ♗b4+! ♔b3

After 1...♔xb4 2 ♘d3+ ♔c3 3 ♘xf2 fxe2 4 ♘e4+ ♔d3 5 ♘f2+ ♔e3 6 ♘g4+ Black has to allow either the e-pawn to be captured or a perpetual check, while 1...♔d4? is bad in view of 2 ♘xf3+ followed by ♘d2.

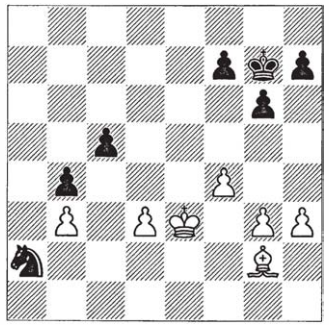
2 ♘xf3 f1♕+ 3 ♗e1

A good illustration of chess logic. For the initial purposes, b3 was the best square for the black king; now, it makes the capture of the e-pawn impossible. The queen will try without any success to get out of the narrow space where it is confined.

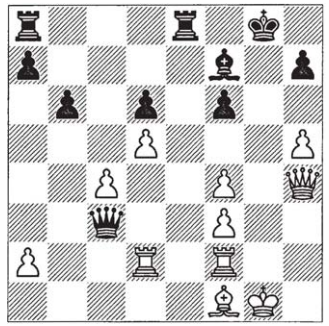
3...♕g2 4 ♗g3 ♔c3 5 ♔d1 ♕h1+ 6 ♗e1+ ♔c4 7 ♔d2 ♕g2 8 ♗g3

In fact, the difference between 'not letting in' and 'not letting out' the queen is not too important. It has more of an optical significance, referring to the size of the spaces delimited by the fortress's walls. The main thing is always to have the white king 'on the other side' from the enemy's most dangerous pieces.

The fortress doesn't always have a global character. It can also serve only local purposes, such as defending a pawn or a small number of pieces, independently of what happens on the rest of the board.



Marin – Florean
Romanian Cht (Herculane) 1996



Jobava – Marin
Batumi Ech 2002

It might appear that White has a huge advantage: his king is better centralized and the bishop is supposedly stronger than the awkwardly placed knight, which is tied to the defence of the weak b4-pawn. However:

35 d4 cxd4+ 36 ♔xd4 f6 37 ♔c5 h6 38 ♗f3 g5 39 ♔c4 ♔f8 40 ♗e4 ♔g7

It now becomes clear that there is no way to conquer the fortress on the queenside.

41 ♗b1 ♘c3 42 ♗d3 ♘a2 43 h4 ♔f8 44 ♔d5 ♔g7 ½-½

The maximum that White could achieve on the kingside is to be left with the g-pawn against nothing, but even then, there would be no way to 'convince' the king to move away from g7. Therefore, a draw was agreed.

Computers are still far from understanding what a fortress is. None of the strongest programs would care about preventing such a typical 'human activity' as taking refuge behind the defensive walls. Besides, any of them would play on for all 50 moves allowed by the rules, firmly convinced that they are winning by, say, "+2.80". This can happen, however, in games played between humans, too. Reaching a fortress position can be almost as unexpected as stalemate, especially if the attacking side has an overwhelming advantage in the initial position.

In the following position, White has a decisive advantage. The black king is very exposed, while the bishop has no available squares. The slight material advantage is, at least for the moment, of less importance. Black's only hope is connected with the endgame, since the pawn-structure favours him. From a formal point of view, he has a 'good' bishop, while White's bishop is restricted by some of his own pawns.

33 ♔h2!

This prophylactic move underlines Black's most serious problem: the instability of the queen on the long diagonal, resulting in the weakness of the crucial f6-square. The young Georgian GM correctly refrains from a direct attack on the g-file: after 33 ♖g2+ ♔h8 34 ♖c2 ♕d4+ 35 ♔h2 ♖g8 Black would manage to provoke some simplifications and could hope to survive.

33...♔f8!?

The king tries to reach safety on the queenside, since the corner is not safe any more: after 33...♔h8 the white rooks would drive the queen away from the seemingly long dark diagonal: 34 ♖c2 ♕d4 35 ♖fd2 ♕a1 36 ♖b2 and the black king would be totally helpless; for instance, 36...♔g8 (after 36...♕xf1 White has the simple 37 ♖g2) 37 ♕xf6 ♕xf1 38 ♖g2+ ♔f8 39 h6! with the unstoppable threat of ♖g8+ followed by ♕g7#. Or 33...♖e3 34 ♖g2+ ♔h8? (34...♔f8 transposes to the game) 35 ♖c2 ♕d4 36 ♖gd2 ♕a1 37 ♖b2 ♕xf1 38 ♖g2, mating.

34 ♖g2 ♖e3 35 ♕g4

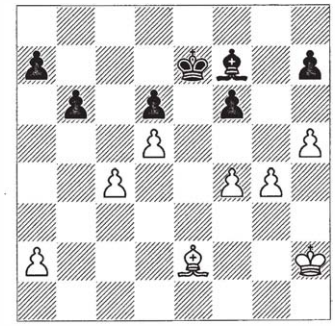
After the game, Jobava found an interesting idea: 35 ♕g3!? f5 (now, after 35...♔e7 36 ♖ge2 ♖g8 White has the decisive 37 ♕e1!) 36 ♕g5 with a strong attack. The merit of the extravagant king manoeuvre is precisely that it

requires from White concrete thinking, at a moment when the game seemed to be practically over.

35...♔e7 36 ♖de2?!

Both 36 ♕g7 (with the point 36...f5 37 ♕g5+ ♕f6 38 ♖de2), and 36 ♕f5 are better.

36...♖g8! 37 ♖xe3+ ♕xe3 38 ♖e2 ♕xe2+ 39 ♗xe2 ♖xg4 40 fxg4 *(D)*



Jobava confessed that during the game he considered this to be the most technical way to the win. White has managed to improve his pawn-structure and he is now effectively a pawn up in the endgame. Nevertheless, the position is drawish: despite White's huge space advantage, he will find no access route into Black's territory. Ironically, after the simplifications Black was left with his previously worst piece, the bishop, which will soon become very effective in defence.

40...h6 41 ♔g3 ♔f8 42 ♗d1

Threatening to 'bury' the enemy bishop with ♗a4.

42...♗e8 43 g5 ♔g7!

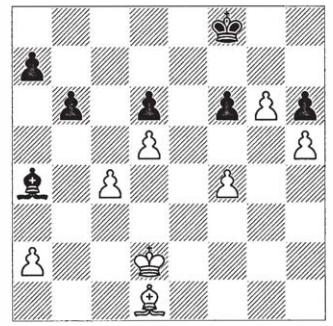
Black is not willing, of course, to open the position. The far-advanced g-pawn will keep the king busy on the kingside, but the bishop, in conjunction with the queenside structure, will be able to resist any attack.

44 g6 ♗d7

Threatening to get even more freedom for the bishop by ...♗f5.

45 ♗g4 ♗a4 46 ♔f2 ♔f8 47 ♔e3 ♔g7 48 ♔d2 ♔f8 49 ♗d1 *(D)*

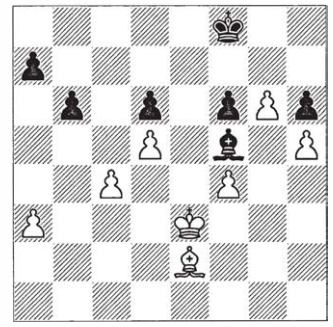
After the game, Jobava called this the decisive mistake. He suggested 49 ♔c3, trying to take advantage of the restricted position of the black bishop. However, after 49...a5! (refraining from this move would be risky: 49...♔g7 50 ♔b4 ♗e8 51 ♗c8 ♔f8 52 ♗b7 planning ♗c6) White cannot make any progress. The overoptimistic 50 c5 bxc5 51 ♔c4 ♔g7 52 ♗c8 ♗d1 53 ♔b5 ♗xh5 54 ♔xa5 ♗f3 could lead to trouble: Black already has two passed pawns.



49...♗d7 50 ♔c3 ♔g7 51 ♔b4 ♔f8 52 ♔c3

After 52 ♗a4 Black should probably play the intermediate 52...a5+!? 53 ♔a3 and only then 53...♗g4 and if 54 ♗c6 then safest is 54...♗d1. 52 c5 is also met by 52...a5+! followed by ...bxc5.

52...♔g7 53 ♔d4 ♔f8 54 ♔e3 ♔g7 55 ♔f2 ♗f5 56 ♗e2 ♗b1 57 a3 ♗f5 58 ♔e3 ♔f8 59 ♔d4 ♗d7 60 ♔c3 ♔g7 61 ♔b4 ♔f8 62 ♗d1 ♔g7 63 ♔c3 ♔f8 64 ♔d3 ♗f5+ 65 ♔e3 ♔g7 66 ♗e2 ♔f8 *(D)*



It was not easy for White to accept the reality; this is the explanation for the last 15 moves. Jobava decided to set a trap...

67 ♗d3 ♗g4 68 f5 ♗xh5 69 ♗e2 ♗xe2 70 ♔xe2

...and I gladly cooperated: we are just one step closer to the draw now.

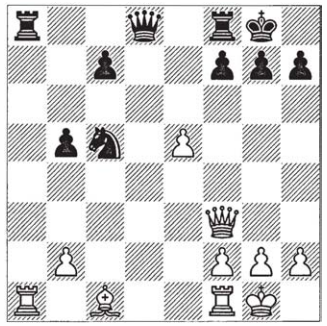
70...♔g8 71 ♔d3 ♔g7 72 ♔c3 ♔f8 73 a4 a5 74 ♔d4

The king cannot go too far: the h-pawn would start to run.

74...♔g7 75 ♔e4 ½-½

The following game is the most remarkable example connected with our theme I've ever seen.

W



Topalov – Anand
Dos Hermanas 1996

18 ♗g5!

Anand had produced a novelty in the opening (an Open Ruy Lopez) but after White's 18th move it became clear that he was going to lose material. In *ChessBase Magazine*, opinions about the merits of the novelty were mixed: Bologan mentioned something about Anand's face's colour around this moment, thus suggesting that it had been just a blunder, while Wedberg considered the queen sacrifice as a logical consequence of the new move. This will probably remain a mystery and we'd better concentrate on the position itself.

18...♖xa1

18...♕e8 loses an exchange without any real compensation: 19 ♖xa8 ♕xa8 20 ♗e7.

19 ♗xd8 ♖xf + 20 ♔xf ♖xd8 21 g3

Necessary prophylaxis by White. 21 ♕c6 ♘e6 22 ♕xb5? is impossible due to 22...♖d1+ 23 ♔e2 ♘d4+.

21...♘e6 22 ♕b7 g6 23 ♕xb5

23 b4 c5 leads to a similar position as in the game.

23...c5

Finally, things have calmed down. White has a considerable material advantage with his chances lying mainly on the kingside. Black is, however, perfectly prepared for such an action. Especially strong is the knight which, in combination with a rook placed on its fifth rank, prevents the standard attack with f4, g4 and f5. The defended c5-pawn ensures two stable squares for the rook, reducing the danger of zugzwang. Even so, the natural sensation is that, in spite of the obvious technical problems, it would be a miracle if there were no way to win the position.

24 h4?!

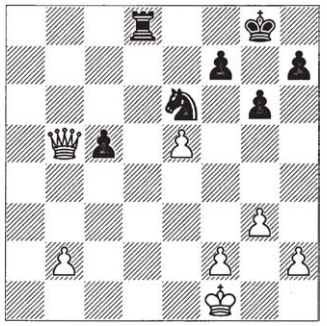
This and the following move are... the shortest way to a draw. The advance of the h-pawn prematurely allows a blockade on the kingside, while after the exchange of the queenside pawns Black will get some freedom of action with his knight; in certain lines of the analysis below, Black faces the danger of zugzwang precisely because moving the knight would mean losing the pawn. It is rather strange that facing the same position five years later, Wedberg, who had superficially annotated Topalov-Anand, 'skipped' the move h4, but couldn't resist making step no. 2, namely b4: 24 b4?! cxb4 25 ♕xb4 h5 26 ♕e7 ♖b8 27 ♔g2 ♖d8 28 ♕f6 ♖d2 29 ♔f1 ♖a2 30 h3 ♖a3 and after some more rook and king moves, the players agreed to a draw in Wedberg-Ernst, Hasselbacken 2001.

24...h5 25 b4?! cxb4 26 ♕xb4 ♔g7 27 ♔g2 ♔g8 28 ♕c3 ♖a8 29 ♕f3 ♖b8 30 ♕e3 ½-½

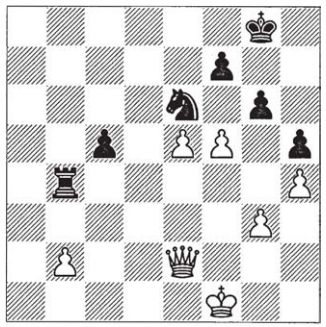
Strangely enough, I didn't find any published analysis of the endgame. It might be that the ease with which Anand managed to draw inhibited further research. However, I was curious to see whether the black fortress would have resisted more serious tests. The analysis presented below is intended to strengthen the reader's faith in the effectiveness of this defensive method, even in such a precarious-looking position as Anand's.

Let us return to the position after 23...c5 *(D)*. The first thing White needs to do is to regroup to defend his second rank.

W



B



24 ♕e2 ♖d4

24...♖b8 25 f4 ♖b3 26 ♕c2 more or less transposes.

25 f4 ♖b4

Black has reached his perfect defensive setup. In principle, the king seems to be safer on g8 and it would be preferable to make the 'tempo' moves with the rook, along its fifth rank or the b-file. White has to find the optimal way to play f5. The first and most tempting possibility is to play h4, practically forcing ...h5, and only then push f5. After ...gxf5, the queen might take either on h5 or f5, depending on its square at the beginning of the operation. Another important decision is where to keep the king. It is easy, of course, to avoid the small traps (such as ♔g2? ♖xf4!) but on which wing will the king be safest and most active? Let's check them one by one. We consider:

A: 26 h4
B: 26 ♕c2

A)

26 h4

The most straightforward plan starts with this move.

26...h5

26...♘d4 27 ♕a6 ♖xb2 28 h5 gxh5 29 f5! suddenly offers White chances.

27 f5 *(D)*

27...gxf5

The tempting 27...♘d4 risks forfeiting the stability of Black's position: 28 ♕a6! (by the way, with the king on g7, White would have the intermediate f6 with check) 28...♘xf5 (also unsatisfactory is 28...gxf5 29 ♕c8+ ♔g7 30 ♕xc5; once again, the king would not have been better placed on g7, since White would have had 29 ♕f6+) 29 e6! (at the cost of one pawn, White has managed to open the position; the knight on f5 looks strong, but can't defend the c5-pawn any more) 29...fxe6 (29...♖xb2 loses to 30 ♕a8+ ♔g7 31 ♕a1!, while 29...♘xg3+ is just what White is looking for: a chaotic position, where the queen becomes very strong; for instance, 30 ♔g1 ♖g4 31 ♕c8+ ♔g7 32 ♕c7!) 30 ♕xe6+ ♔g7 (30...♔h7 is even worse: 31 ♕f7+ and, in order to avoid ♕g8-h8+ Black must play 31...♘g7; White continues 32 b3 planning to bring the king to c2 and attack the c-pawn with the queen) 31 ♔e1!. The king is going to c1. Black will probably not be able to defend his c-pawn.

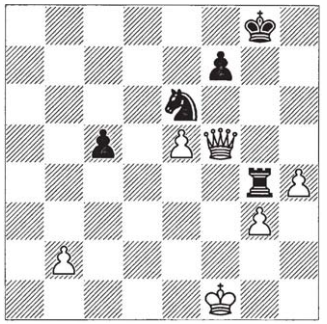
28 ♕xh5 ♖g4

28...♖b3 might just transpose.

29 ♕xf5 *(D)*

29 ♔f2 would leave the queen a bit misplaced: 29...♘g7 30 ♕h6 ♘e6 (threatening ...f4 with a similar structure as in the main line) 31 ♔f3 ♘d4+ and so on.

B



29...♖xg3

Black's defensive plan is based on bringing the rook to f4, defending 'everything'. After that, the king might try to attack the h-pawn, especially if it advanced. In case Black did not reach this set-up, the main danger would be the advance of the pawn to h7, so as to be exchanged for the most important black pawn: f7.

30 ♔f2

After 30 h5 ♖g5 Black wins one of the pawns, while 30 ♕f6 allows 30...♖g4 followed by ...♖f4.

30...♖b3

The simplest. Black exploits the exposed position of the white king. After 30...♖g6?! White could make some progress: 31 ♔e3 ♖g3+ 32 ♔e4 ♖g1 33 ♕f6 planning to manoeuvre the king from d5 to e7.

31 h5

31 ♕c2 ♖h3 is no improvement for White.

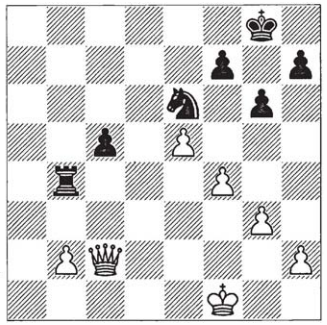
31...♖xb2+ 32 ♔e3 ♖b3+ 33 ♔e4 ♖b4+ 34 ♔d5 ♖d4+ 35 ♔c6 ♖f4 36 ♕h3 ♔h7

Black has no problems at all.

B)

26 ♕c2 *(D)*

B



This is another possible placement for the queen, in order to capture the other pawn after f5 gxf5.

26...♖b8

As we shall see in the next comment, against this plan the rook should keep the b-file under control.

27 ♔e1

After the planned kingside action, White will be left with two weaknesses, on b2 and g3. He can choose to defend either of them with his king. As we shall see, the transfer to the queenside is the most dangerous plan. After 27 h4 h5 28 ♔g2 (28 f5 gxf5 29 ♕xf5 ♖b3! would transpose to the main line after the exchange of the h5- and g3-pawns, while after 30 ♔g2 ♖xb2+ 31 ♔h3 ♖b3! White has lost a pawn and cannot make any progress) 28...♖b4 29 ♔h3 ♖b8 30 f5 gxf5 31 ♕xf5 Black has the nice resource 31...♖b3!, when the black pawn is taboo. White can still try 32 ♕c2!? but 32...♖e3! maintains the balance (32...♖b4 is inferior: 33 ♕d1 ♖g4 34 ♕f3 threatening ♕f5).

27...♖b4 28 ♔d1 ♖d4+ 29 ♔c1 ♖b4 30 ♔b1 ♖d4 31 f5

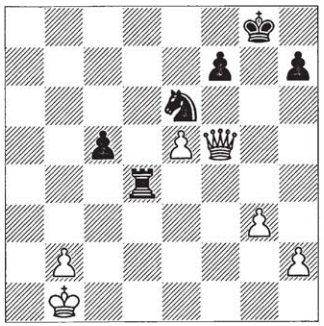
White also has other ways to prepare the advance of this pawn:

a) 31 h4 h5 32 f5 gxf5 33 ♕xf5 ♖g4 34 ♕xh5 ♖xg3 35 ♕f5 (for the moment, the rook cannot reach the f4-square; the only way for White to make progress is to advance his king on the a-file; playing h5 would allow ...♖g5 when Black would quickly solve the problem of his rook) 35...♔g7 36 ♔a2 ♔g8 37 b3 ♖g2+ 38 ♔a3 ♖d2 (the elegant 38...♖g1!, preventing any further advance of the king because of ...♖a1+ and ...♘d4+, also looks playable) 39 h5 ♖d4 40 h6 ♖h4 41 ♕f6 ♖f4 and Black has reached his perfect set-up.

b) 31 ♔a2 ♖b4 32 b3 is likely to transpose to the previous line: 32...♖d4 33 h4 h5 34 f5 gxf5 35 ♕xf5 ♖g4 36 ♕xh5 ♖xg3 37 ♕f5 ♖g2+.

31...gxf5 32 ♕xf5 *(D)*

B



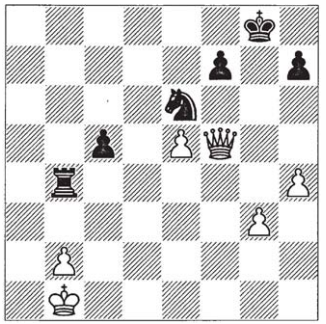
In order to create winning chances, White will have to advance his kingside pawns anyway,

but he will weaken the g3-pawn only at a moment when Black is unable to attack it.

32...♖b4 33 h4 *(D)*

Planning to advance the pawn to h6. 33 g4 is less dangerous: 33...♖f4 34 ♕h5 ♔g7 35 g5 ♔g8 36 ♕h6 ♖d4 37 h4 ♖f4 38 h5 ♖g4 39 ♕f6 ♖xg5 40 h6 ♖g4 planning to bring the rook to the back rank, when White cannot make any progress.

B



33...♖d4 34 h5 h6!

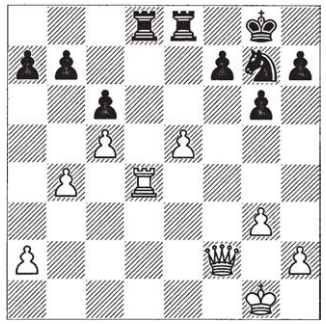
Only this well-timed move keeps the fortress functioning. Passive play would lead to defeat: 34...♖b4 35 h6 ♖d4 36 ♕f3 (the black rook is forced to defend the back rank) 36...♖d8 37 ♕b7 ♖e8 38 ♕d7 ♖d8 39 ♕e7 ♖c8 40 g4 (White plans to break with g5-g6 at the right moment) 40...♖b8 41 g5 ♖f8 (Black is forced into an extremely passive position; after a neutral move like 41...♖c8 White could play the immediate 42 g6 hxg6 43 h7+ ♔g7 44 ♕f6+ ♔xh7 45 ♕xf7+ ♘g7 46 e6 although he should probably bring his king to c4 or c3 before this) 42 ♔c1 (White's king initiates a march to f6) 42...♔h8 43 ♔d2 ♔g8 44 ♔e3 ♔h8 45 ♔e4 ♔g8 46 ♔f5 ♔h8 47 ♔f6 ♔g8 48 b3 (a useful move for the ensuing endgame, also putting Black into zugzwang) 48...♔h8 49 ♕xf8+! (the huge space advantage is converted into a win by this elegant, though simple, tactical operation) 49...♘xf8 50 ♔xf7 ♘d7 51 e6 ♘e5+ 52 ♔f6, winning.

35 ♕f6 ♖g4 36 ♕xh6 ♖xg3

with an already familiar picture.

At the time the following game was played I of course hadn't seen the game Topalov-Anand yet. Therefore, I was very disappointed that I failed to convert my material advantage into victory against the young Indian boy sitting in front of me and moving the pieces at lightning speed. It was only recently that I discovered where I missed a win as well as a possible reason for my failure.

B



Marin – Anand
Oakham 1986

White has both a material and a spatial advantage, which offer him excellent winning chances.

27...♖d5!?

Objectively, this might be not the best move, but it is the best practical chance. It changes the character of the position and requires accuracy from White over the next few moves. The more natural 27...♘e6 allows 28 ♖d6, when White can combine threats on both wings and bring his king to an active position. In the long run, the position should be winning, but, what is even worse, Black has no real chance to escape from his difficulties even if White plays inaccurately. Giving up the control of the d-file leads to immediate problems: 27...♖xd4 28 ♕xd4 ♘e6 29 ♕d7.

28 ♖xd5 cxd5 29 b5?!

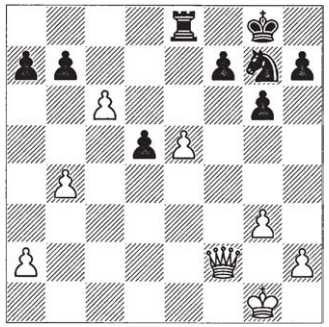
This move doesn't yet throw the winning chances away, but is a clear sign of a mistaken approach.

I was afraid of the position becoming dynamic and hoped to win the game by normal, slow methods. I might have been influenced by the previous phase of the game, when my opponent had balanced over the precipice using

unexpected tactical means. In this position, Black's saving chances are connected precisely with the static elements of the position. Therefore, a dynamic treatment was required from White, while such a thing is still possible, that is before Black manages to arrange his pieces on optimal squares (knight on e6, pawn on d4, and rook on e7).

Specifically, 29 c6! *(D)* is very strong.

B



For instance: 29...b6!? (I vaguely remember that I was afraid of the d-pawn in the line 29...bxc6 30 ♕xa7 ♘e6 31 ♕d7 ♖d8 32 ♕xc6 d4 but the calm 33 ♔f1, preparing to block the pawn with the king, wins easily) 30 ♕f3! (White should hurry, since if Black had time to play ...♘e6 and ...d4, he would be out of danger; 30 ♕d4 is not too dangerous: 30...♖d8 31 c7 ♖c8 32 ♕xd5 ♘e6! with a defensible position) 30...♘e6 (what else? 30...d4 31 c7 and 30...♖xe5 31 c7 are immediately losing for Black, while the counterplay after 30...♖d8 31 ♕a3 d4 32 ♕xa7 d3 is too slow because of 33 c7) 31 ♕xd5 ♖e7 (Black hopes to build a fortress anyway, but, as we shall see, the absence of the d-pawn gives White too much freedom of action) 32 b5 h5 33 ♕d6 ♖c7 34 ♔f2 ♔g7 35 ♔e3 ♔g8 (35...♖c8 36 ♔d2 ♖d8 is too naive an attempt to prevent the white king from crossing the d-file; besides, he is not threatening anything, and White wins by 37 ♕xd8 ♘xd8 38 c7) 36 ♔d2 ♔g7 37 ♔c3 ♔g8 38 ♔b4 ♔g7 39 a4 ♔g8 40 a5 bxa5+ 41 ♔xa5 ♔g7 42 b6 axb6+ 43 ♔xb6 (with the d-pawn still on the board, ♕xc7 wouldn't be a real threat) 43...♖c8 44 ♔b7 ♖d8 45 c7 winning for White.

29...♘e6 30 c6 bxc6

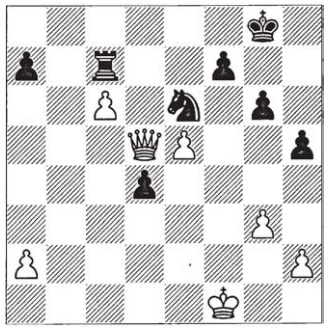
Black is not yet prepared to play 30...b6. After 31 ♕f3 d4 32 ♕a3 it appears that the move 29 b5 was not a loss of time compared to 29...♘e6: White now controls the e7-square, preventing a fortress. Black's counterplay is still not dangerous: 32...♖d8 33 ♕xa7 (or simply 33 ♔f1) 33...d3 34 c7 and White wins.

31 bxc6?

The continuation of an erroneous strategy. White should win after 31 ♕xa7; for instance, 31...cxb5 32 ♕b7 (precisely this square, to prevent ...♖a8xa2) 32...♖d8 33 ♕xb5 d4 34 ♔f1!.

31...d4 32 ♔f1 ♖c8 33 ♕f3 h5 34 ♕d5 ♖c7 *(D)*

W



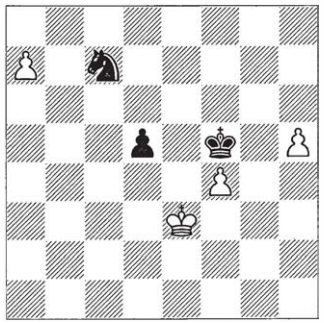
Black has reached a perfect set-up; the rest of the game is instructive but doesn't need special comments.

35 ♕d6 ♔g7 36 h4 ♔g8 37 ♔f2 ♔g7 38 ♔f3 ♔g8 39 g4 hxg4+ 40 ♔xg4 ♔g7 41 h5 gxh5+ 42 ♔xh5 ♔h7 43 ♔g4 ♔g6 44 ♕d5 ♖e7 45 ♕e4+ ♔g7 46 ♕f3 ♖c7 47 ♔f5 ♔f8 48 ♕d5 ♔g7 49 ♕g2+ ♔f8 50 ♔f6 d3 51 ♕e4 ♘d8 52 ♕d4 ♖xc6+ 53 ♔f5 ♘e6 54 ♕xd3 a6 55 ♕a3+ ♔e8 56 ♕a4 ♘d8 57 ♔e4 ♔e7 58 ♔d5 ♖e6 59 ♕h4+ ♔d7 ½-½

The notion of a fortress is usually associated with static factors. In artistic chess, there are many examples of what I would call dynamic fortresses, based on the knight's ability to create barriers in the way of the opponent's king. Here is a nice ending taken from practical chess. Anand's name appears for the third time in this chapter; posterity might call him a classic specialist of the fortress. Just by coincidence, the opening was the same as in his game

against Topalov, and Vishy got into early trouble again. After a tough defence, he reached a controversial endgame. Both Sergei Ivanov in *Informator* and Viktor Mikhalevski in *ChessBase Magazine* consider the diagrammed position to be winning for White. The ChessBase endgame specialist Hecht is only slightly less categorical: he states that Black's heroic defence shouldn't have been enough for a draw. The surprising outcome of the game (see below) combined with the annotators' superficiality prevented them all from seeing a bit deeper.

W



Svidler – Anand
Dos Hermanas 1999

White's pawns are very dangerous, restricting both black pieces in their actions. The white king has a higher degree of liberty, but has to reckon with the advance of the black pawn as well. The d4-square is not available: ...♘b5+ and ...♘xa7 draws in most cases. The first step of the winning attempt is to force the advance of the black pawn in order to eliminate the barrier c4-d4-e4.

57 ♔d2 ♔f6 58 ♔c2 ♔f5 59 ♔b3 d4

Black could have postponed this move, but not avoided it forever: 59...♔f6 60 ♔b4 ♔f5 61 ♔c5 d4 (this is now forced; after 61...♔f6, White wins by 62 ♔c6 ♘a8 63 ♔xd5) and now White should return with his king, transposing to the game, rather than insisting with 62 ♔b6, when 62...♘a8+ 63 ♔b7 d3 64 ♔xa8 d2 65 ♔b7 d1♕ 66 a8♕ ♕d5+ leads to perpetual check (d8-d5-a5).

Advancing the pawn at a moment when it is not yet necessary is a small psychological trick: Anand tries to suggest to his opponent that Black has nothing to fear. In fact, as the course of the game shows, neither of the players knew what was really going on.

60 ♔c4 ♔f6 61 ♔d3 ♔f5

The king takes on the pawn's task of controlling the e4-square.

62 ♔e2 ♔f6 63 ♔f2!

Using his relatively greater freedom, the white king will push his counterpart back.

63...♔f5

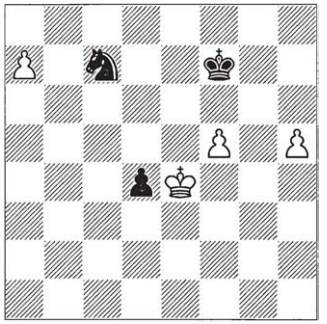
Unlike his opponent, Black cannot triangulate: 63...♔e6? 64 h6 ♔f6 65 f5 transposes to the final position of the game, with a win for White.

64 ♔f3 ♘a8 65 ♔e2 ♘c7 66 ♔d3

By definition, the knight cannot triangulate either, so the black king has to retreat. The annotators considered this to be a zugzwang. It would be, indeed, if the position weren't a draw anyway.

66...♔f6 67 ♔e4 ♔f7 68 f5 *(D)*

B



68...♔f6?

This innocent move has escaped the attention of most annotators. In fact, it is a decisive mistake. *Informator* inserted into Ivanov's notes the move 68...♔g7! with the text 'Seirawan', without giving any further comments. The idea is simply brilliant: the king keeps both white pawns under observation, preventing them from advancing. The remaining black forces are cooperating perfectly. After 69 ♔d3 the zugzwang is once again not real: the g8-square is as good as g7:

a) Mikhalevski only mentions that playing 69...♔f6(?) 70 h6 changes nothing.

b) 69...♔h6? loses to an echo line of the final variation of the game: 70 f6 ♔h7 71 ♔xd4 ♘b5+ 72 ♔d5 ♘xa7 and now 73 ♔d6! threatens f7, while also keeping the knight out of play.

c) 69...♔g8! and now the white pawns still cannot advance without the immediate danger of perishing. For instance: 70 h6 (with the pawns on the fifth rank, 70 ♔xd4 is not dangerous either) 70...♔h7 71 ♔xd4 ♘b5+ 72 ♔d5 ♘xa7 (Black is out of danger; compared with line 'b', White's h-pawn is too far advanced) 73 f6 ♔xh6 74 ♔d6 ♔g6 followed by ...♘c6.

69 h6 ♔f7 *(D)*

We already know from the previous games that Vishy's fortresses seem to have some hypnotic effect over his opponents, preventing them from using all the resources of the position. However, here we have an extreme case: one move after the decisive mistake, Black offered a draw and White accepted it!

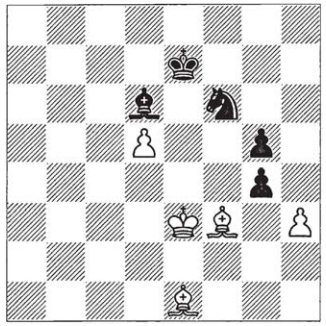
½-½

As was discovered soon after the game, White is winning with study-like, although not so difficult to find, variations: 70 ♔xd4! ♘b5+ 71 ♔c5 ♘xa7 72 ♔b6 ♘c8+ 73 ♔c7 ♘a7 (the apparently safe 73...♘e7 loses to the unexpected 74 h7 ♔g7 75 f6+!) 74 ♔d7 ♘b5 (an echo line would be 74...♔f6 75 h7 ♔g7 76 f6+ ♔xh7 77 f7 ♔g7 78 ♔e8; White can choose between the e7- and e8-square depending on the knight's position) 75 h7 ♔g7 76 f6+ ♔xh7 77 f7 ♔g7 78 ♔e7 queening.

Throughout history, many fortresses have been conquered by patient attackers because of hunger and despair of the besieged. Similar things also happen in chess with frequency: tired after a long game, the defending player himself opens the gates of the fortress.

And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.
(JOSHUA 6; 5)

In the following position Black should draw despite being a pawn down.



M. Gurevich – Stohl
Haifa Echt 1989

56 hxg4

The moment of this pawn exchange is important, because from now on Black will 'only' need to resist for 50 moves in order to claim a draw. Not finding any constructive plan, Gurevich simply moves his pieces around for a long time.

56...♗f4+ 57 ♔d4 ♔d7 58 ♗e2 ♔e7 59 ♗b4+ ♔d7 60 ♗f3 ♔c7 61 ♗e7 ♘e8 62 ♗e4 ♘d6 63 ♗h7 ♘b5+ 64 ♔d3 ♘d6 65 ♗g8 ♔d7 66 ♗f6 ♘b5 67 ♗e6+

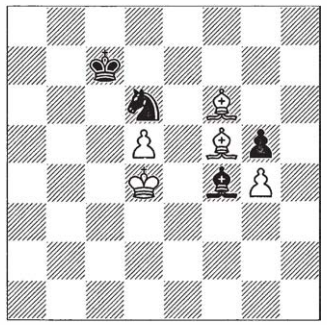
The bishop will stay here for 25 moves. It is not the best square, as in some cases it blocks its own king, but Gurevich had a very cunning idea. The opponent will be left enough time to develop adequate reflexes against White's ideas in the present configuration. Later, when a small change is made, he will have problems adapting to the new circumstances.

67...♔c7 68 ♗g7 ♔d8 69 ♔c4 ♘d6+ 70 ♔d4 ♗c1 71 ♗f6+ ♔e8 72 ♔d3 ♗f4 73 ♗c3 ♔e7 74 ♗d4 ♗c1 75 ♔c2 ♗f4 76 ♔b3 ♘e4 77 ♔c4 ♔d6 78 ♗g7 ♔c7 79 ♔d4 ♘d6 80 ♗f6 ♘b5+ 81 ♔d3 ♘d6 82 ♗c3 ♔d8 83 ♗b4 ♘b7 84 ♔e4 ♘d6+ 85 ♔d4 ♘b7 86 ♗e1 ♔c7 87 ♗f2 ♔d8 88 ♗g1 ♘d6 89 ♔d3 ♔e7 90 ♗d4 ♔d8 91 ♗h8 ♔c7 92 ♗f5

Here it is, the critical moment. Black is just 14 moves away from reaching a draw and his vigilance had probably lowered. Stohl failed to understand in time the significance of the e6-square.

92...♘b5 93 ♗f6 ♘d6 94 ♔d4 *(D)*

94...♗c1??



Finally opening the gates of the fortress. A neutral move like 94...♘b5+ is enough for a draw.

95 ♔e5

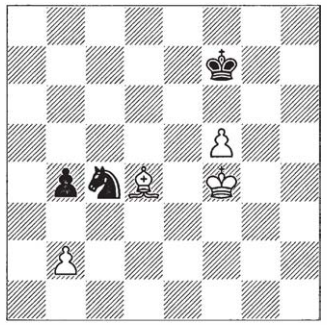
With the bishop on e6, this move would have been impossible in view of ...♗b2+ winning the f6-bishop.

95...♘f7+ 96 ♔e6 ♘d8+ 97 ♔e7 ♗f4 98 ♔f8 ♘b7 99 ♔f7 ♔d6 100 ♗e6 ♗d2 101 ♔g6 1-0

White will win the pawn just four moves before the 50-move limit. Such bad luck...

Exercises

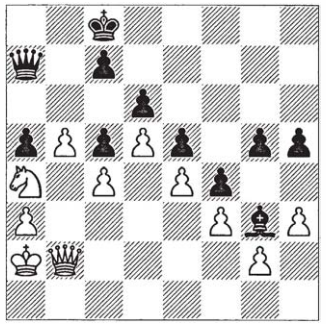
5.1



Kožul – Zaja
Pula 1997

Black's position is difficult: his king has to guard the f-pawn, while the b4-pawn is highly vulnerable. Is there any hope for him?

5.2



A. Petrosian – Hazai
Erevan 1970

This game was played long before computers had entered everyday chess life. Imagine, however, that you are playing a game on the Internet and your opponent has just played:

1...♕b6

Convinced that this was just a mouse slip, you wait a few seconds for the 'take back' request. What would be your move if that did not happen?

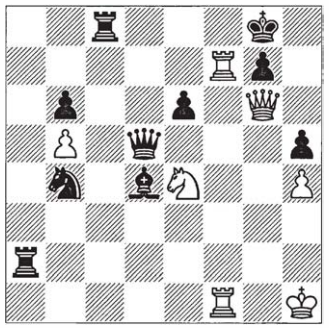
6 Stalemate

In the harmonious universe of chess, stalemate looks like a point of discontinuity. The winning process usually consists of increasing the pressure against the enemy's position, gradually restricting his possibilities. It is obviously not in accordance with human intuition that such a total and humiliating restriction of the opponent as the impossibility to move only leads to a draw.

It is true that we can see a similar situation in certain mathematical systems, where the infinite is equivalent to zero, but it is more difficult to find such a situation in real life. This is why in practice the possibility of reaching a stalemate position is often overlooked, even by strong and experienced players.

Stalemate is usually associated with the endgame; there are only rare cases when a large army is reduced to immobility. We shall start precisely with such an example:

B



Miles – Nedobora
Seville 1994

White's position is miserable, but Tony had noticed a possible saving idea. Therefore, he awaited his opponent's move in total immobility, barely breathing, in order not to make him suspicious.

40...♖e2?

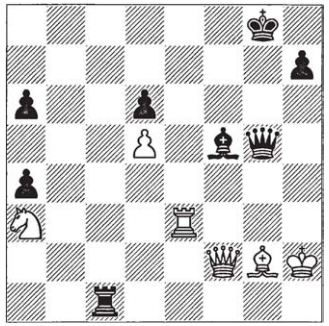
When this apparently killing move was made, he quickly sacrificed all his pieces:

41 ♖f8+! ♖xf8 42 ♖xf8+ ♔xf8 43 ♕f7+ ½-½

This was a nice example, but its artistic value is clouded by the fact that Black's carelessness was an essential ingredient.

In the next two fragments, the stalemate positions arose as the consequence of logical play. At the same time, they were by no means less unexpected for the attacking side than it was for Nedobora.

B



Marin – Sax
Odorheiu Secuiesc 1993

Black has excellent compensation for the sacrificed piece; the white king is exposed and the knight is too busy blockading the a-pawn to provide any help.

38...♕h5+

White's answer looks like a blunder.

39 ♗h3!

After 39 ♔g3 Black is not forced to repeat the position with 39...♕g5+; he can try to continue the attack. Having found a safer way, I was not really curious to test Sax's attacking skills.

39...♗xh3 40 ♖xh3 ♖h1+ 41 ♔xh1 ♕xh3+ 42 ♕h2 ♕xa3

My opponent played this without blinking. As our post-mortem established, White can hold the endgame resulting after 42...♕f1+ 43 ♕g1+ ♕xg1+ 44 ♔xg1; for instance: 44...♔f7 45 ♘c4 ♔e7 46 ♔f2 ♔d8 47 ♔e3 ♔c7 48 ♔f4 a3 49 ♘xa3 ♔b6 50 ♔f5 ♔c5 51 ♔e6 h5 52 ♘b1! h4 53 ♘c3 h3 54 ♘e4+ ♔b4 55 ♔xd6 and the pawns will promote at the same time.

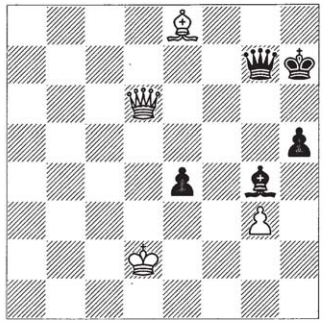
43 ♕g3+!

Sax awarded this unexpected move with a spontaneous "Bravo!". I felt like I had just won a game.

½-½

The next example presents no fewer than three different stalemate positions, a remarkable achievement even for a study composer.

B



Ibañez – L. Marin
Andorra 2002

In spite of the reduced material left on the board, Black has winning chances, based on the bad coordination of the white pieces.

59...♕b2+ 60 ♔e3 ♕c1+

Luiza intuitively avoided 60...♕e2+ 61 ♔f4 ♕f3+ 62 ♔g5 ♕f5+ 63 ♔h4 because she feared that the position of the white king would make stalemate ideas possible. During our joint analysis we believed that 63...♗f3 would have given winning chances. Anticipating a stalemate is sometimes difficult even when you are aware of the danger. After 64 ♕f4 (in fact, as I discovered later, White has a simpler draw with 64 ♕e7+ ♔h6 65 ♗d7; for instance, 65...♕g6 66 ♕f8+ ♕g7 67 ♕f4+ and the king cannot escape the checks) we continued our line with 64...♕g4+ (Black has no real winning chances after 64...♕xf4+ 65 gxf4 e3 66 ♔g3 e2 67 ♔f2 h4 68 ♗d7; if her king tried to reach an active position, the f-pawn would start to advance) 65 ♕xg4 hxg4 and concluded that Black is easily winning by advancing the e-pawn; it is remarkable that in spite of the absence of tournament stress we missed 66 ♗g6+!, when the bishop is taboo because of stalemate again, while 66...♔g7 67 ♗xe4 draws immediately.

61 ♔xe4!

Ibañez played this move rather quickly; he had probably already seen the final position. Anything else would have lost. After 61 ♕d2? ♕a3+! Black wins the enemy bishop: 62 ♔d4 ♕d6+ 63 ♔c3 (63 ♔e3 ♕h6+ wins the queen) 63...♕c7+ followed by a check on the back rank, while 61 ♔f2 e3+ leads to mate.

61...♕e1+ 62 ♔f4 ♕xe8

Black hadn't noticed anything yet, but playing 62...♕f2+ would have led to an echo line: 63 ♔g5 ♕e3+ 64 ♔h4 ♕xe8 65 ♕g6+!.

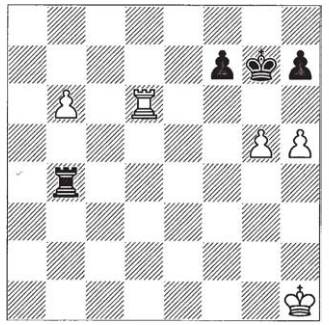
63 ♕e7+!

A nice stalemate in the centre of the board!

½-½

One would expect that in correspondence chess, stalemate would rarely come as a surprise. We shall see, however, that this defensive method can easily be overlooked even when the players have plenty of time to analyse.

B



Neil – Andeer
corr. 1995

White has excellent chances to convert his material advantage into victory: the rook is

very well placed on the sixth rank while the threat of h6+, pushing the king back to a passive and exposed position, looks very unpleasant.

1...h6!?

By sacrificing this pawn, Black will either attract the white rook to a passive position, or make the h7-square available to the king. There is no time for pawn grabbing: 1...♖h4+ 2 ♔g2 ♖xh5 (the other pawn is less important: after 2...♖g4+ 3 ♔f3 ♖xg5 White still has 4 h6+ ♔f8 5 b7 winning) 3 ♖d5! ♖h4 4 ♖b5 and the pawn cannot be stopped any more.

2 gxh6+

2 ♖xh6? places the rook on a passive square and leads to an immediate draw: 2...♖h4+ 3 ♔g2 ♖g4+ 4 ♔f3 ♖xg5.

2...♔h7 3 ♖f6

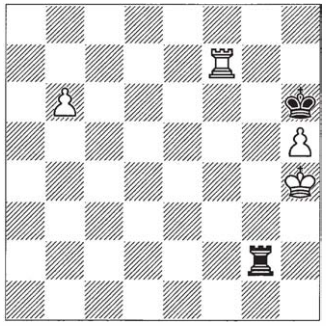
In order to create winning chances, it is important to block this pawn. Otherwise Black would have little trouble defending: 3 ♔g2? f5! 4 ♖f6 f4 5 ♔f3 ♔h8 and when the king tries to improve its position, Black will push his f-pawn, exchanging it for the b6-pawn, drawing.

3...♖g4

It might seem that there is little sense in restricting the white king to the h-file, since it will manage to escape rather easily.

4 ♔h2 ♖g5 5 ♔h3 ♖g1 6 ♔h4 ♖g2 7 ♖xf7+ ♔xh6 *(D)*

W



8 b7?

After 8 ♖b7? we would again have an echo variation: 8...♖g4+!! 9 ♔h3 ♖g8 and White cannot make further progress.

However, the simple 8 ♖f6+ ♔h7 (or 8...♔g7 9 ♖g6+!) 9 h6 wins easily: 9...♖g1 10 ♔h5 ♖g2 11 ♖f7+ ♔h8 12 b7 ♖b2 13 ♔g4! (avoiding a last trap: 13 ♖f8+ ♔h7 14 b8♕? ♖xb8 15 ♖xb8 again with stalemate).

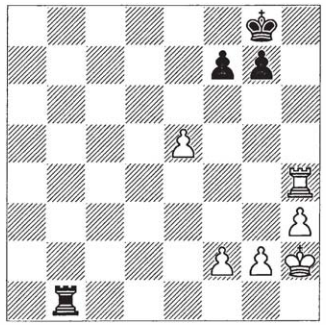
8...♖b2 9 ♔g4

The king is going to c8; is there anything Black can do? Of course there is!

9...♖xb7! ½-½

The last example of this chapter is a real gem.

B



Reshevsky – Geller
Zurich Ct 1953

Black's position is obviously losing, but, as we shall see, not entirely hopeless. The game was played near the end of the candidates tournament at a moment when Reshevsky needed to win in order to catch up with the leader (and, as we know by now, the winner-to-be) Vasily Smyslov. The American champion might have underestimated the analytical skills of the Soviet grandmasters, as he even suggested to Geller resigning the adjourned game without play!

The whole endgame is a perfect illustration of what well-thought-out play can achieve even in fairly unequal circumstances (such as being two pawns down). Geller mentions that in the nocturnal analysis he discovered, together with Averbakh, the following three saving ideas: the rook endgame with h- and f-pawns, some situations where the white connected pawns are blockaded by the black king and... a stalemate position!

41...♖e1

Black provokes a slight weakening in the position, while also leaving the white rook in a temporarily uncomfortable position.

42 f4 ♖e3

Preventing the king from advancing via g3 and thus 'inviting' White to commit an inaccuracy.

43 ♖g4 ♔h7 44 ♖g3 ♖e2 45 h4?!

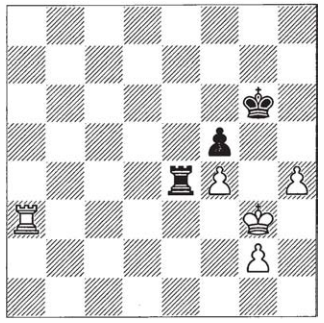
This natural move, preparing ♔h3-g4, is in fact the main cause of White's failure to win the endgame. Objectively, the position is still winning, but, suddenly, great accuracy is needed. Better is 45 ♖f3 followed by ♔g3. The consequences of weakening the g4-square were rather masked and became obvious only after Black's 46th move.

45...♖e4 46 ♖f3 f6! 47 exf6 gxf6 48 ♔g3

As Geller pointed out, 48 g4 f5 would lead either to a drawish position with the h- and f-pawns or to the blockade of the connected pawns after 49 g5 ♔g6, when it is highly problematical for White to win.

48...♔g6 49 ♖a3 f5 *(D)*

W



The game hasn't gone Reshevsky's way. Black has achieved quite a lot: in order to win, White has to find a concrete plan, while in the adjourned position it seemed that virtually every move would be winning. Let's follow Geller describing the only winning plan: "White should aim for a set-up where his rook goes to g5, the pawn advances to h5 and the king to h4. Black would be forced to keep his own king on h6 and the rook on its fourth rank. Then, there could follow g4 and Black would have no saving intermediate check in order to get the endgame with h- and f-pawns."

50 ♖a6+

Geller considers this to be the decisive mistake and states that White could have won only with 50 ♖a8. He doesn't give any variations; just the plan. I was a bit frustrated when I realized that things were more complicated than this short description. Later, when I managed to work out some winning lines, I understood that in such cases, concision is highly pedagogical: the 'student' is given the truth in its essential aspects; in order to assimilate it better, he is left to uncover all the details on his own. I have experienced this more than once, when reading annotations by Botvinnik, Averbakh and other titans of the past. The first impression was one of superficiality, covering many errors, but very rarely did I manage to find a mistake in the annotations during my own analysis. My analysis of this endgame goes:

a) 50...♖e3+ 51 ♔f2 ♖b3 52 ♖g8+ ♔f6 (after 52...♔h6 we can follow Geller's plan: 53 ♖g5 ♖b5 54 ♔g3 ♖a5 55 ♔h3 ♖b5 56 h5 ♖a5 57 g3 ♖b5 58 ♔h4 ♖a5 59 g4 winning) 53 h5 (this is the concrete illustration of Geller statement "Black would be forced to keep his own king on h6"; now, 53 ♖g5 would be pointless; for instance, 53...♖b4 54 g3 ♖b2+ 55 ♔f3 ♖h2 and the position is drawish) 53...♖b1 54 ♖g6+ ♔f7 55 ♖a6 and once again the control of the sixth rank gives White an easy win: 55...♖h1 56 h6 (threatening h7 followed by ♖a8) 56...♔g8 57 ♖g6+ ♔h7 58 ♖g5 winning.

b) If Black wants to prevent the rook from going to g5, he must give up the sixth rank: 50...♔g7 51 ♖a6 (51 h5 might be even easier) and then:

b1) 51...♖e3+ (trying to fight against the h-pawn from behind) 52 ♔f2 ♖b3 53 h5 ♖b1 54 h6+ ♔f7 55 h7 ♖h1 (55...♔g7 loses the f-pawn to 56 ♖a5) 56 ♖a8! and White forces a winning pawn ending.

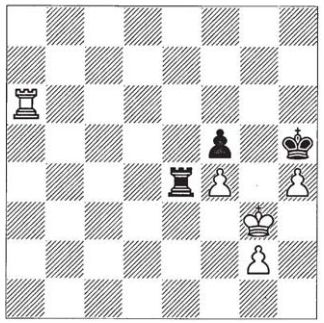
b2) 51...♖b4 (Black wants to keep the f4-pawn under observation, to prevent the activation of the king) 52 h5 ♖c4 53 h6+ ♔f7 54 ♖a7+ (54 h7 ♔g7 55 ♖a7+ ♔h8 is rather unclear: stalemate positions are possible!) 54...♔g6 (after 54...♔g8 55 ♖a5 White wins the f5-pawn) 55 h7 ♖c8 56 ♔h4 ♖h8 and now White can get a favourable form of the f- and h-pawns endgame: 57 g4 fxg4 58 ♔xg4 ♖b8 59 f5+ ♔f6 (or 59...♔h6 60 ♖e7 ♖a8 61 f6 ♔g6 62 f7 and Black cannot fight against both far-advanced pawns) 60 ♔h5 ♔xf5 (60...♖c8 61 ♔h6 ♖b8 62 ♖g7 ♖b1 63 ♖g5 is also hopeless for Black) 61

♖f7+ ♔e6 62 ♖f4 and White reaches a theoretical winning position.

50...♔h5 *(D)*

Geller tries for his third idea: the stalemate. While Reshevsky managed to avoid Black's first two traps, he was completely unaware of the third one. We already know that 50...♔g7 51 h5 is easily winning for White.

W



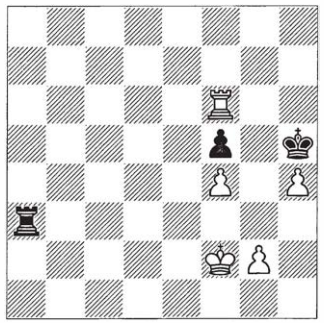
51 ♖f6?

In fact, only this move throws the win away. Reshevsky could still have won this crucial game by playing 51 ♖a8; for instance: 51...♔g6 (or 51...♖e3+ 52 ♔f2 ♖b3 53 g3 followed by ♖g8) 52 ♖f8 (threatening h5+) 52...♖e3+ 53 ♔f2 ♖a3 54 g3 (54 h5+ is now a mistake: 54...♔xh5 55 ♖xf5+ ♔g4 with a draw) 54...♖a5 55 ♖g8+ ♔f6 (as we know, on 55...♔h6 there would follow 56 ♖g5, while 55...♔f7 does not really win a tempo: 56 ♖g5 keeps the black rook busy for just one more move, enough for the white king to avoid being pushed back to the first rank) 56 ♔g2 ♖a2+ 57 ♔h3 ♖a1 58 ♖g5 (White places the h5-square under control and prepares the advance of the pawn; as we shall see, this will be connected with two different plans, depending on Black's reactions) 58...♖b1 (Black can prevent the manoeuvre h5, ♖g6+, ♖a6 by playing 58...♖h1+ 59 ♔g2 ♖a1 60 h5 ♖a2+ 61 ♔h3 ♖a1 but then the white king has time to advance: 62 ♖g6+ ♔f7 63 ♔h4) 59 h5 ♖h1+ 60 ♔g2 ♖a1 61 ♖g6+ (61 h6? seems to spoil the win: 61...♖a2+ 62 ♔h3 ♖a1!) 61...♔f7 62 ♖b6 with a familiar position.

Facing, rather unexpectedly, concrete problems, Reshevsky might have been happy to find the winning idea, but didn't have the patience or energy left to look for the details. This is why I consider 45 h4 an almost decisive mistake.

51...♖e3+ 52 ♔f2 ♖a3 *(D)*

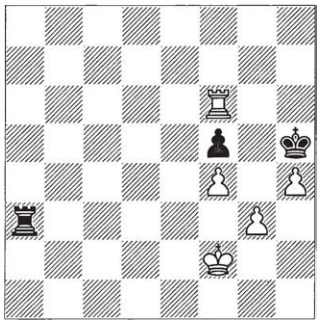
W



53 g3 *(D)*

Geller briefly mentions that after 53 ♖xf5+ ♔xh4 the endgame is drawish as White's pawns are blockaded. However, he doesn't mention the move 54 ♖g5 with the threat of getting an easily winning position with g3+. Black, whose king is paralysed just as it will be in the game, has at his disposal an echo variation, something we have got used to by now: 54...♖a2+ 55 ♔f3 (the king searches for shelter on the abandoned black kingside; going to h2 would make no sense: Black would play ...♖h1+! with a stalemate; approaching the enemy rook would also be useless, since the checks would continue even with the rook *en prise*) 55...♖a3+ 56 ♔e4 ♖a4+ 57 ♔e5 ♖e4+! (but not 57...♖xf4?, which loses to 58 g3+!) 58 ♔f5 ♖xf4+! with a draw.

B



53...♖f3+!

Oops! This shock might have cost Reshevsky more than just half a point: he played the final part of tournament considerably weaker than he had up until that point and, despite Smyslov's defeat by Kotov, he finished two whole points behind the winner.

54 ♔e2

On 54 ♔g2 there would follow, of course, 54...♖xg3+!.

54...♖xg3 55 ♖xf5+ ♔xh4 56 ♔f2 ♖a3

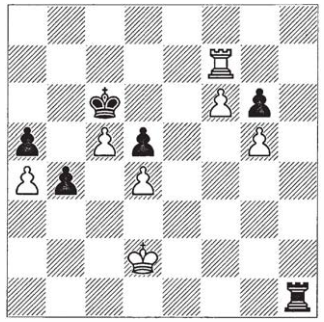
The rest is not interesting:

57 ♖g5 ♖b3 58 ♖g1 ♔h5 59 ♔e2 ♖a3 60 f5 ♖a5 ½-½

Exercises

6.1

B

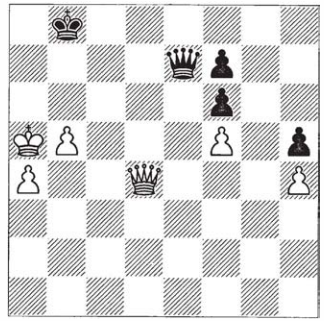


Rustemov – Goldin
Russian Ch (Elista) 1995

Can Black save the game?

6.2

B

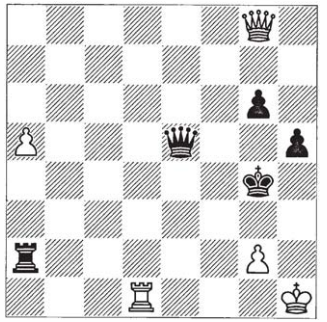


Chigorin – Schlechter
Ostend 1905

White is obviously winning; was the move **44...♕c7+** just a blunder, making things easier for White?

6.3

B



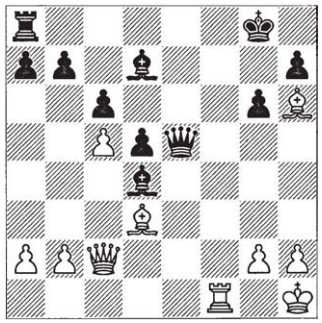
Spassky – Keres
USSR Ch (Baku) 1961

White simultaneously attacks g6 and a2. The black king feels rather unsafe. Black played **66...♖a1**. Was this a good idea?

7 Perpetual Check

Perpetual check can arise in various types of situations; in none of them is easy to find similarities with the real world.

If something has gone wrong for the attacking side, perpetual check is a possible refuge.



Smyslov – Mikenas
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1949

White is a pawn down and his compensation might look a bit problematic or at least of a volatile character. Mikenas found an elegant way to convert his temporarily better coordination into a draw:

25 ♗xg6 hxg6 26 ♕xg6+ ♔h8

Apparently, White has achieved less than nothing. However, after...

27 ♗e3!

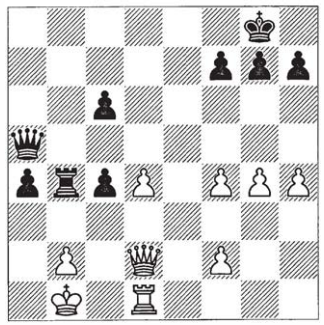
...a draw was agreed.

½-½

If Black plays 27...♕xe3, then 28 ♕h5+ leads to a perpetual, while 27...♗xe3? loses to 28 ♖f7.

27 ♗f8 is less effective because of 27...♕e4 followed by ...♕h7 when Black defends (in the tournament book, Alatortsev gives 27...♗e8(?) which loses to 28 ♕h6+ ♔g8 29 ♗d6!).

In positions with mutual attacks on opposite sides of the board, the speed of action is of vital importance. In the next game, the perpetual check came to help Black at a moment when White seemed to have won the race to create serious threats.



Marin – Condie
Oakham 1986

The position is rather unusual, with a strange pawn-structure and piece positioning.

30 ♖e1

White played this hoping to create dangerous threats on the back rank.

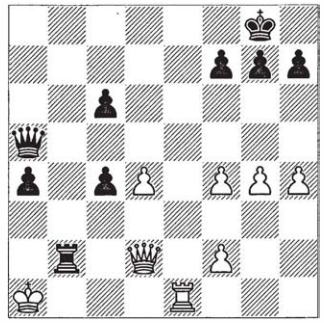
What can Black do? His pieces are stuck on the queenside and typical pawn moves to open the king's position are not really a solution: 30...h6 31 ♖e8+ ♔h7 32 ♕c2+ g6 33 h5 and White's attack breaks through first: 33...a3 34 hxg6+ fxg6 35 ♖e7+ ♔h8 36 ♕xg6 ♖xb2+ 37 ♔a1; or 30...g6 31 ♖e8+ ♔g7 32 d5! followed by a check on the long diagonal.

30...♖xb2+!

The alignment of the pieces along the e1-a5 diagonal favours White from a static point of view, but not from a dynamic one... The rook is obviously taboo.

31 ♔a1 *(D)*

Did Black miss this move? All his pieces are hanging now, because of the mating threat on the back rank.



31...♖a2+!

Not at all! The rook forces perpetual check. The idea of such repeated checks on the second rank with an undefended but nevertheless invulnerable rook was illustrated for the first time in the brilliant game Steinitz-Von Bardeleben, Hastings 1895. The difference is that Steinitz's combination was a winning one.

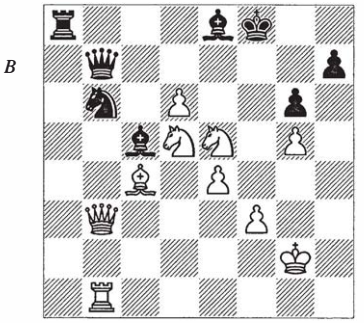
½-½

In the previous examples the initial position was more or less equal and the perpetual came as a logical consequence. We shall now examine a more interesting situation, both technically and psychologically.

In chess, the winning process often requires patience; progress is made with small steps. We already know from Chapter 6 (Stalemate) that concentrating an excessive number of forces on a small part of the board (in that case, around the enemy king) can have undesired consequences. We shall see now that rushing in with the pieces can also leave their own king without sufficient protection. Although the opponent is not really in a position to start a mating attack, he might use a part of his forces (usually the queen) to give a long series of checks, which sometimes proves to be perpetual.

We can conclude that stalemate and perpetual check find themselves in some sort of symmetry in the philosophical universe of chess. They are both consequences of an exaggerated aggression and manifest themselves at the opposed poles of the position: the two kings.

I have a wealth of experience with perpetual checks, but have never been on the lucky side. Here is a typical example:



Marin – Hogea
Eforie Nord 1988

Throughout the whole game, White had methodically increased his advantage and by now he was awaiting resignation from his opponent.

45...♕g7!?

When this unexpected move was played, I unsuspectingly started grabbing material:

46 ♘xb6?!

With a minimal analytical effort I would have understood the dangers behind such an optimistic, computer-like, approach and might have found 46 ♘d3! taking full advantage of Black's lack of coordination; for instance: 46...♗a4 47 ♘xc5 ♗xb3 48 ♘e6+.

However, I was not psychologically prepared for this: "The position looked so winning shortly before, that simple solutions should work too."

46...♕xe5 47 ♘xa8 ♕xg5+

I was convinced that with such a normal placement of most of my pieces there should be no problem escaping with my king.

48 ♔f1 ♕g1+ 49 ♔e2 ♕f2+ 50 ♔d1 ♕g1+ 51 ♔d2 ♕g5+

Not 51...♕f2+ because of 52 ♗e2.

52 ♔d1 ♕g1+ 53 ♔d2 ♕g5+ 54 f4 *(D)*

I had put big hopes into this move.

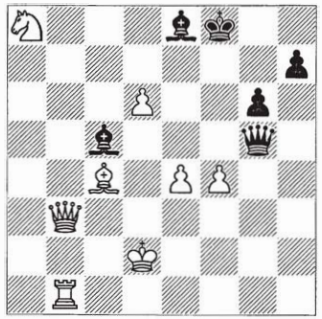
54...♕xf4+ 55 ♔d1

55 ♔c2 ♕f2+ would get White nowhere. Apparently, White has managed to calm things down, but Black's next move came as a cold shower:

55...♕xe4!!

Black's position has become so strong that he can allow himself to make a quiet move. White's e-pawn was obstructing the communication

B

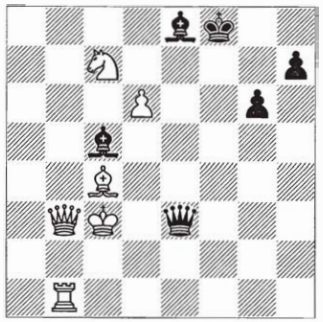


between some important lines and diagonals; by eliminating it, Black renews the threat of perpetual check. At the same time, White is not really given time to breathe: he must somehow defend his knight. Otherwise, his material advantage would vanish almost completely.

56 ♗d5?

White places the long diagonal under control, but leaves the d3-square without sufficient cover. 56 ♘c7 is necessary, although calculating everything until the end would have been practically impossible: 56...♕h1+ 57 ♔d2 (57 ♔c2 ♕h2+ 58 ♔c1 ♕h6+) 57...♕h6+! (diagonal checks are very effective in such situations; it is easy to verify that White can defend against other moves) 58 ♔c3 ♕e3+ *(D)* and now White must make an important decision.

W



a) 59 ♗d3? allows a relatively simple draw by 59..♕d4+. Therefore White should move his king, but to which square?

b) 59 ♔b2? (although the king should obviously be aiming for the a1-square, this direct try fails to cause Black problems) 59...♕d2+ 60 ♔a1 (60 ♕c2? loses the queen: 60...♗d4+ 61 ♔b3 ♗a4+) 60...♕a5+! (after 60...♗d4+? 61 ♖b2 Black cannot win the material back, because White would get a decisive counterattack against the black king) 61 ♕a2 ♗d4+ 62 ♖b2 ♕e1+ 63 ♕b1 ♕a5+ and White should take the draw rather than put his last piece on a passive position with 64 ♗a2?, when 64...♗f7 brings Black out on top.

c) 59 ♔c2!. Only this move, suggested by Graham Burgess, keeps White on the winning track. The idea is to choose a different, less direct, route to a1, in order to force the black queen to check from less favourable squares: 59...♕f2+ 60 ♔d1 ♕g1+ 61 ♔d2 ♕g5+ (diagonal checks again; the importance of having an extra piece back in the game, namely the knight, is illustrated in the lines 61...♕f2+ 62 ♗e2 ♕f4+ 63 ♔c2!, when 63...♗a4 is impossible in view of 64 ♘e6+, and 61...♕h2+ 62 ♗e2 ♕xd6+ 63 ♘d5, when White should win) 62 ♔c2 ♕g2+ 63 ♔c3 ♕g3+ 64 ♔b2 ♕f2+ (this square is much worse than the d2-square, as in line 'b') 65 ♔a1 ♗d4+ 66 ♖b2. Now the king has reached complete safety. Black's only remaining idea is to simplify to an endgame, where the reduced number of pawns would offer some drawing chances. However, with precise play, White should win:

c1) The spectacular 66...♗f7!? fails to draw by just one tempo: 67 ♗xf7 ♕xb2+ 68 ♕xb2 ♗xb2+ 69 ♔xb2 ♔xf7 70 ♔c3 h5 71 ♔d4 h4 72 ♘d5! and White manages to regroup in the most efficient way: 72...♔e8 73 ♘f6+ ♔d8 74 ♔c5 h3 75 ♘g4 easily winning.

c2) 66...♗d7 67 ♔a2 ♕xb2+ 68 ♕xb2 ♗xb2 69 ♔xb2 h5 (if 69...♔g7 then 70 ♗e6! winning on the spot) 70 ♘e6+ followed by the centralization of the king.

Although technically speaking, 56 ♗d5 was the decisive mistake, from a practical point of view we should put the blame on 46 ♘xb6; the subtleties connected with the king's route to a1 are very difficult to notice during the game.

56...♕d4+ 57 ♔c1?

White is pushing things too far. He should have taken a draw with 57 ♔e2 ♕f2+.

57...♕g1+?

Focused on reaching a draw, Black misses his chance to take revenge for all his suffering from the previous part of the game. A stronger line is 57...♕f4+! (diagonal check again!) 58 ♔b2 (other moves lose the queen to ...♗a4) 58...♕d2+ 59 ♔a1 (after 59 ♕c2 White loses the queen to an already familiar mechanism: 59...♗d4+ 60 ♔b3 ♗a4+) 59...♗d4+ 60 ♖b2 ♗xb2+ 61 ♕xb2 ♕d1+! (it is important to drive the queen away from the long diagonal before taking the bishop) 62 ♕b1 ♕xd5 and Black has good winning chances.

58 ♔b2 ♕d4+

58...♕f2+ is also good.

59 ♕c3 ♗a3+! 60 ♔c2 ♗a4+ 61 ♗b3 ♕e4+ 62 ♕d3 ♕c6+ ½-½

After 63 ♔d1 ♕h1+ 64 ♔e2 ♕g2+ 65 ♔e1 ♗b4+ 66 ♔d1 ♕g1+ the king finds no peace.

In the previous game, the black queen had important support from the two bishops. The next example is even more revealing for the effectiveness of the strongest piece in such situations: the queen does the whole job almost alone.

B

Rogozenko – Marin
Internet rpd 2003

Black's position is obviously losing. Moreover, he had very little time left.

25...♕xb2!?

It was, of course, impossible to calculate in just a few seconds whether the acceptance of the sacrifice would lead to a perpetual, but I knew this was my best practical chance.

26 ♔g2

For the moment, White resists the temptation and improves the position of the king. The threat of ♕xe8 is serious now.

26...♕e5

Offering White a second chance...

27 ♕xe8?

...which he can't resist taking. In spite of having plenty of time at his disposal, he might have let himself be guided by general considerations such as: the white pieces are well defended, the knight controls important squares, the bishop is pinned; the king should therefore escape somehow.

27...♕e4+ 28 ♔f1

The king has to start walking. After 28 f3 Black reaches a draw without any difficulty: 28...♕c2+ 29 ♔f1 ♕d1+ 30 ♔f2 ♕d2+ 31 ♔f1 ♕d1+ 32 ♔g2 ♕c2+ 33 ♔h3 ♕f5+.

28...♕c4+?

28...♕h1+ 29 ♔e2 ♕e4+ 30 ♔d2 ♕d5+ is the correct way to reach a position from the comment on Black's 31st move.

29 ♔e1?

Returning the favour. 29 ♔g1 wins.

29...♕c1+ 30 ♔e2 ♕c2+ 31 ♔e3 *(D)*

There is no escape on the weakened light squares on the black kingside: 31 ♔f3 ♕d3+ 32 ♔g4?? ♕f5+ 33 ♔h5 ♕g6+ 34 ♔g4 f5+ winning the queen.

B

31...♕c1+?!

Black is also thinking in general terms: in such situations, diagonal checks are usually the most effective.

As we shall see, this move doesn't let the draw slip away yet, but 31...♕b3+ is more precise; for instance: 32 ♔d4 ♕d1+ 33 ♔c4 ♕d5+ 34 ♔c3 ♕f3+ 35 ♔d2 (there is no escape on a4 either: 35 ♔b2 ♕e2+ 36 ♔b3 ♕d1+! and, although pinned, the bishop is alive!) 35...♕d5+

(Black keeps checking from a distance of two squares; this mechanism resembles a medieval dance, with the white king and the black queen turning around a centre of symmetry situated on d3) 36 ♔c2 ♕a2+ 37 ♔c3 ♕a1+ 38 ♔c4 ♕a2+ (diagonal checks are opportune now, when there is the danger of covering the king with the knight) 39 ♔d3 ♕b1+ and the king has already exhausted all his escape possibilities.

The main drawback of 31...♕c1+ is that in the main line presented below the concrete circumstances will change more than once, requiring Black to adapt himself to them again and again. This is hardly desirable for the defending side, especially in time-trouble, because the risk of going wrong increases.

32 ♔d3

32 ♔f3 is a shorter transposition to the game.

32...♕d1+ 33 ♔c3 ♕c1+

As we know, 33...♕f3+ is more precise.

34 ♔d3 ♕d1+ 35 ♔e3 ♕e1+ 36 ♔f3 1-0

The game came to a sudden end here, when Black overstepped the time-limit. However, I could have fought on (because we had an increment of 5 seconds every move) if I had found an unexpected check in time:

36...♕h1+

36...♕d1+ is of little use: 37 ♔g2 ♕d5+ 38 f3 ♕d2+ 39 ♔h3 and the king escapes.

37 ♔g4 ♕e4+ 38 ♔xg5

The elimination of this pawn will make the f4- and h4-squares available to the king. However, as we shall see below, Black can take advantage of the clearance of the c1-h6 diagonal.

38...♕f5+

There is a significant difference between this move and 38...h6+. Although both moves lead to a draw, 38...h6+ allows more than one method of reaching it: 39 ♔h5 ♕f5+ 40 ♔h4 ♕g5+ 41 ♔h3 ♕f5+ 42 ♔g2 ♕e4+ 43 ♔f1 and here Black should stick to the mechanism mentioned above: 43...♕h1+ 44 ♔e2 ♕e4+ 45 ♔d2 ♕d5+ 46 ♔e3 ♕b3+ (46...♕e5+, as in the main line, is entirely possible) and the f4-square is of little use: 47 ♔f4 ♕c4+.

39 ♔h4 ♕f6+ 40 ♔h3 ♕f5+ 41 ♔g2 ♕e4+ 42 ♔f1 ♕h1+ 43 ♔e2 ♕e4+ 44 ♔d2 ♕d5+ 45 ♔e3 ♕e5+!

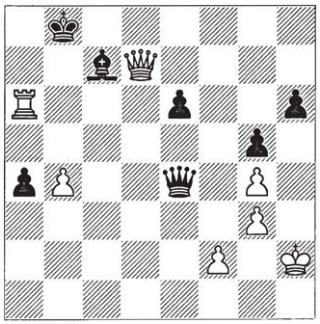
With the g5-pawn missing, 45...♕b3+? is bad: 46 ♔f4 ♕c4+ 47 ♔g5! h6+? (relatively better is 47...♕c5+ 48 ♔h4 ♕xf2, but White can then secure a better ending with 49 ♕xf7+) 48 ♔f6! and White wins.

46 ♔d3 ♕f5+

with a draw.

We have seen how many subtleties are hidden behind what might seem a game of cat and mouse. There is no wonder that in some cases the king can escape after precise play. In spite of the final outcome, the next game is one of my favourites.

B



M. Gurevich – Marin
Batumi Ech 2002

Black has just blundered a whole knight, and his king is under strong attack. However, the game is not over yet.

71...♗xg3+!

Gurevich was very surprised by this move and spent almost all his time on trying to understand what was going on.

72 ♔h3!

With his move, White forces the queen to check from unfavourable squares. Instead, 72 ♔xg3 ♕f4+ 73 ♔g2 ♕xg4+ leads to an immediate draw, since 74 ♔f1? loses the rook to 74...♕c4+.

72...♕h1+ 73 ♔xg3 ♕g1+ 74 ♔f3 ♕h1+ 75 ♔e2

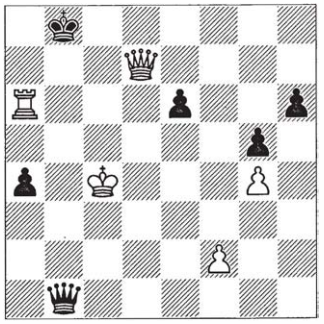
After 75 ♔e3 ♕e1+ the king cannot cross the d-file.

75...♕e4+ 76 ♔d2 ♕xb4+ 77 ♔d3 ♕b1+ 78 ♔c4 *(D)*

78...♕b3+

The variation starting with this move is the fruit of a sleepless night following the defeat. I

B



showed it to several players present in Batumi and some of them seem to have liked it so much that they published it in several magazines, forgetting to mention the initial source.

Gurevich himself didn't look very convinced next morning when I told him that after the best defence from my part he would have won only with a study-like variation. He needed one more day to check everything before agreeing with me.

During the game, however, I was already convinced that the position was drawish and when I saw Gurevich's last move I thought that he had blundered the rook. I enjoyed the situation for a few seconds before playing 78...♕f1+??, but got a cold shower: 79 ♕d3 ♕c1+ 80 ♔b5 1-0.

79 ♔c5 ♕c2+ 80 ♔b5 ♕e2+ 81 ♔a5

After the careless 81 ♔b6? (trying to win time) 81...♕xf2+ the position is drawish. The difference can be seen in the main line.

81...♕e1+ 82 ♔xa4

This pawn has to be eliminated before switching to the main plan.

82...♕a1+ 83 ♔b5 ♕f1+ 84 ♔c5!

This is the only way to avoid the perpetual.

84...♕xa6

84...♕xf2+ loses to 85 ♔d6, but now White simplifies into a winning pawn ending:

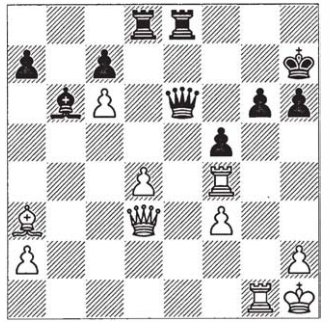
85 ♕d6+!

It is here where the presence of the f-pawn is important.

Exercises

7.1

W

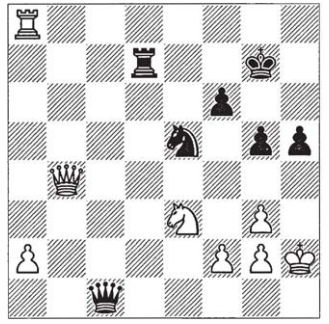


Blackburne – Steinitz
London (10) 1863

Black has good control of the centre and has an advantage. White's chances are on the kingside. Blackburne played **34 ♖h4**. Should Black force the exchange of queens with 34...♕e2?

7.2

B

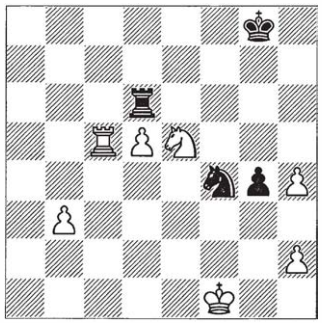


Martinez Aipizar – Benzanilla
Cuba 1995

Both kings are exposed, but White's attack seems to be more dangerous. What would you do with Black?

7.3

W



Marin – Timoshenko
Tallinn 1989

Slightly irritated by Black's unwillingness to resign, White missed the opportunity to win a fourth pawn with 51 ♘xg4 and played a weaker move:

51 ♘c4?!

Black wasn't attracted, of course, by the knight endgame and preferred to harass the white king:

51...♖f6

What would you do now? I decided to play 'safe':

52 ♔g1

Instead, 52 ♖c8+ followed by 53 d6 would have won easily. Is there any hope for Black now?

8 The Soul of Chess

And he said, hear now my words: if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.
(NUMBERS 12; 6)

The title of 'World Chess Champion' wasn't formally introduced until 1886, but even before then people had an idéa about who was the best chess-player of the moment. In the second half of the 18th century, Philidor was considered the unofficial champion.

A favourite musician of the royal courts and one of the founders of the Comic Opera in Paris, Philidor had also acquired an extremely broad education. There is no wonder that he tried to bring more coherence and harmony to his favourite game; the chaotic character of most of the games played by his contemporaries didn't satisfy his aesthetic sense. People of his time did not, however, really understand Philidor's new views; they considered them to be just some eccentricities that, after all, the best player of the day could be allowed to manifest.

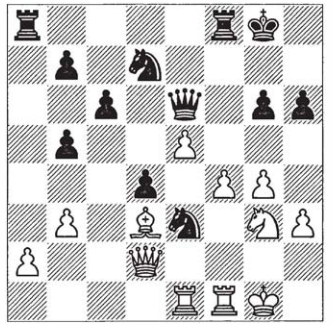
The essential role played by the pawns in a chess game was Philidor's most important discovery. In his books and articles, he tried to demonstrate this with instructive examples such as the following:

Philidor
Instructional game 1749

1 e4 e5 2 ♗c4 ♗c5 3 c3 ♘f6 4 d4 exd4 5 cxd4 ♗b6 6 ♘c3 0-0 7 ♘ge2 c6 8 ♗d3 d5 9 e5 ♘e8 10 ♗e3 f6 11 ♕d2 fxe5 12 dxe5 ♗e6 13 ♘f4 ♕e7 14 ♗xb6 axb6 15 0-0 ♘d7 16 ♘xe6 ♕xe6 17 f4 ♘c7 18 ♖ae1 g6 19 h3 d4 20 ♘e4 h6 21 b3 b5 22 g4 ♘d5 23 ♘g3 ♘e3 *(D)*

24 ♖xe3 dxe3 25 ♕xe3 ♖xa2 26 ♖e1 ♕xb3 27 ♕e4 ♕e6 28 f5 gxf5 29 gxf5 ♕d5 30 ♕xd5+ cxd5 31 ♗xb5 ♘b6 32 f6 ♖b2 33 ♗d3 ♔f7 34 ♗f5 ♘c4 35 ♘h5 ♖g8+ 36 ♗g4 ♘d2

W



37 e6+ ♔g6 38 f7 ♖f8 39 ♘f4+ ♔g7 40 ♗h5 1-0

As we see, for the sake of creating two mobile connected pawns, Philidor was ready to sacrifice material, something that people usually did only to get chances for a direct attack. Lacking practical material (databases were not available then), the great chess-player and musician couldn't give to his theory a more general character and he considered the creation of a mass of connected pawns as a purpose in itself.

It is remarkable, however, that his famous statement 'pawns are the soul of chess' never lost its validity; nowadays it forms part of our basic knowledge. In a certain sense, Philidor could be compared with the Old Testament's prophets, who were able to foresee things that were going to happen many centuries later, but couldn't understand them entirely. Therefore, they had to describe them using words and notions available in their times; even so, the audience found the announced events difficult to believe.

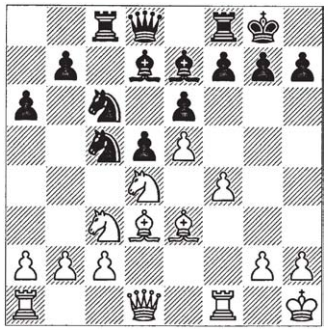
I shall now try to emphasize the most important aspects of pawn play from the perspective of our main theme in this book, defence.

The most dangerous attacks are those based on a combined action of the pawns and pieces.

The perfect scenario would be to open some lines and/or diagonals and immediately occupy them with his own pieces. For the attacking side it is essential to maintain a balance between these two components. We shall see how ineffective (or even risky in a boomerang-like sense) it can be to push the pawns without sufficient support or to rush in with the pieces without the previous intervention of the infantry.

Let's take the first situation. For the defender, the traditional recommendation is to refrain from pawn moves on the side where the opponent is planning an attack. However, practice provides us with surprisingly many exceptions, mainly because attacks are not always carried out in the best way. Here are two remarkable examples:

W



Chandler – Andersson
Sarajevo 1985

The opening has just come to an end; both sides need only to connect the rooks in order to complete their development. However, White's attention was distracted by his attacking prospects on the kingside. Since 13 f5 is not possible because of 13...♘xe5, he played:

13 ♘xc6?!

Looking at it from a general point of view, this is an obvious concession, helping Black to improve the position of his pieces. As often happens, tactics will prove the correctness of the general principles. More logical is 13 ♕f3 planning ♖ad1 and ♕g3, combining pressure in the centre with a possible attack against the king. In this case, White's chances are preferable.

13...♗xc6 14 f5?!

Nimzowitsch compared an enemy unblockaded pawn (d5 in our case) with a dangerous offender who has to be safely imprisoned (14 ♗d4) while half-measures such as permanent surveillance (from e3) tend to be insufficient. Murray knew this, of course, but he had managed to work out some nice tactical lines in case of an immediate attempt at escape by the prisoner: 14...d4? 15 f6! ♘xd3 (or 15...dxe3 16 ♗xh7+! ♔xh7 17 ♕h5+ ♔g8 18 ♕g5 and Black can avoid mate only with huge material losses) 16 ♕g4 g6 17 ♕h4 ♖e8 18 fxe7 ♕xe7 19 ♗g5 ♕f8 20 ♕xd4 with a clear advantage for White.

I shall allow myself a short digression here. Generally, there are two tendencies of thinking in chess.

The first one is to rely on basic principles and try to prove them with concrete calculation of variations. This method is relatively safe, in the sense that it contains a low degree of risk of errors. At the same time, it allows a better administration of time and energy during the game. It is true that in certain cases, some hidden resources of the positions could escape the attention of the player employing this method. However, it largely depends on one's ability to apply the principles and, in the end, on one's intuition.

The other possible direction is to rely mainly on calculation. Once a nice complex of variations has been worked out, the player tries to convince himself that the principle he's violating doesn't apply in that case (or else he simply decides not to worry about such issues). This is not a very economical attitude, but it suits young players, given their resources of energy and optimism. It can sometimes lead to incredible discoveries. When this approach fails, the punishment usually comes before the main branch of variations and consists of a surprisingly simple move.

I am more of an adept of the first direction, but I have to confess that I have gone astray more than once by adopting the second one.

Returning from the abstract world to the concrete situation on the board, 14 ♗d4 is more prudent. White only needs one tempo to launch an attack with f5 or to consolidate by defending the e4-square with ♕f3, but this tempo had been thrown away on the 13th(!) move. Black would play 14...♘e4 interfering with the d3-bishop's diagonal. After 15 ♗xe4 dxe4 the e4-pawn is not so easy to win, just as in certain lines of the Sicilian; for instance: 16 a3 (16 ♖e1 allows 16...♗b4, when Black has little to fear) 16...♕c7 17 ♕e2 b5 18 ♖ac1 (this pawn would have been hanging after 18 ♘xe4) 18...♖fd8 19 ♕e3 ♕b7 20 ♖fe1 b4! 21 axb4 ♕xb4 and Black has reached a dynamic balance.

14...♘xd3 15 ♕xd3 *(D)*

B

So, what's wrong with the d4-square? The threat of f6 looks strong while ...exf5 is an obvious concession.

15...f6!!

Murray must have been very impressed by this unexpected move; I took the double exclamation mark from his comments for *Informator*. Suddenly, White cannot maintain his central positions.

16 exf6

16 ♗d4 is a belated attempt to stabilize the position: 16...fxe5 17 ♗xe5 d4. Murray ends his variation here, mentioning that Black takes next move on f5, with a clear advantage. He might have overlooked that he could play 18 ♗xd4, based on the fact that after 18...♖xf5 19 ♖xf5 exf5 20 ♕xf5 the other black rook is hanging. Instead, the superior 18...♗f6 neutralizes the white bishop and leads to a situation similar to the game: 19 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 20 fxe6 (20 ♕c4? loses to 20...♗xg2+!) 20...♕xe6.

16...♗xf6 17 fxe6 d4!

The light-squared bishop, initially placed on the passive d7-square, now becomes a most dangerous attacking piece, and also keeps the enemy knight under control.

18 e7 ♕xe7 19 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 20 ♕xd4 ♕g5

Black's pressure against g2 and (in many cases) c2 more than compensates for the slight material deficit. White managed to hold a draw, though not without difficulties.

In the next example, the front of action was much broader, but the essence of it was very much the same.

B

Korchnoi – Spassky
Kiev Ct (4) 1968

Although there is no direct contact yet between the enemy pieces or pawns, the tension makes itself felt.

Both sides have concentrated a significant number of forces on the side where they are going to attack; the position is likely to explode at any moment. Compared to other openings (such as the French and the King's Indian) where the attacks are carried out by pushing the pawns in front of the king, there is a significant difference: the centre is not fully blocked yet. This suggests that both players need to be somewhat cautious; before starting their own attack, it would be wise to take preventive measures against the opponent's actions.

White has already done this, by playing an early g3 in order to discourage a later ...f4. However, this move has seriously affected the elasticity of the pawn-structure on this side of the board, by weakening the f3-square.

From this point of view, Black is in a better situation: his queenside pawns are more flexible. Black also has slightly better development. In order to proceed with his queenside play,

White still needs to connect his rooks and transfer his king to a2. Instead of waiting for the impressive white pawn formation to start advancing, Spassky prepares to meet it halfway.

14...c6!?

In his notes to the game in the book *Matchi Pretendentov 1968* Korchnoi shows that he was deeply impressed by Spassky's play in this phase of the game.

15 h3?! *(D)*

During the game, however, he seems not to have understood his opponent's idea. This is excusable, since with so many white minor pieces on the queenside it is hard to believe that Black could push more pawns and remain unpunished.

The idea of playing a prophylactic move is correct, but Korchnoi chose the wrong wing! It was essential to provide as much support as possible to the far-advanced pawns in view of the imminent collision. Better in this sense is 15 ♔b1; if Black plays as in the game he can't achieve the same configuration: 15...b6 16 ♔a2 a5 17 bxa5 bxa5 18 ♖b1 ♖fb8 19 ♘d2, and here 19...♘g4 fails to bother White; after 20 ♖xb8+ ♖xb8 21 ♘b3 planning h3, ♗e2 and ♖b1 the weakness of the a5-pawn makes itself felt. Moreover, as a consequence of the exchange of one pair of rooks, the plan based on ...♖b4 would be less viable, because White could consider taking the rook without risking falling under attack.

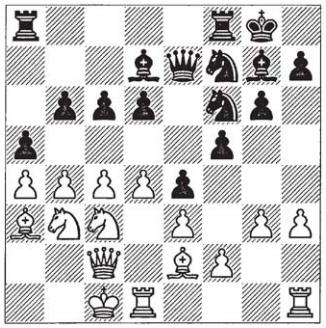
B

15...b6!

The purpose of Black's previous move becomes clear now. If played directly, 14...b6 would have weakened c6 in a similar way that g3 did with the f3-square; White could have taken advantage of it and achieved a favourable queenside configuration by playing 15 b5 or 15 d5.

16 ♗e2 a5 *(D)*

W



The culmination of a very unusual plan indeed. White is forced to define the pawn-structure earlier than he would have liked to. This is a perfect illustration of Nimzowitsch's assertion that an unsupported pawn majority (or, in a more general sense, formation) is likely to become the object of an attack.

17 bxa5

Consistent but risky. After the more prudent 17 b5 Black would achieve his primary aim, of blocking the queenside and leaving White's minor pieces without scope, by playing 17...c5. Later, he could have concentrated all his forces on the kingside, in a slow pawn attack. However, judging from the later course of the game, this might have been a relatively better option for White. (Curiously, in his notes for *Informator*, Tal attaches an exclamation mark to 17 b5 and only considers 17...cxb5 18 ♘xb5 with an obvious advantage for White.) Black is also perfectly prepared for what seems to be White's only possible active plan: 18 dxc5 dxc5 19 ♘d5 ♘xd5 20 cxd5 and now the knight can jump to the perfect blockade square: 20...♘d6!.

17...bxa5 18 ♔b1

The king has problems finding a safe square. Tal recommends 18 ♕a2 ♖fb8 19 ♔c2 as a possible improvement, but I don't think this would have changed the character of the game too much; for instance, 19...♕d8 (this move is necessary to defend the a5-pawn) 20 ♖b1 ♖b4! 21 ♗xb4 (or 21 c5 ♗e6 and the queen is badly placed on a2) 21...axb4 22 ♘d1 c5! when 23 dxc5? fails to 23...♖xa4 24 ♕b2 dxc5 25 ♘xc5 ♘d5 with a strong attack.

18...♖fb8 19 ♔a2 *(D)*

B

19...♘g5?!

Finding such an original (even revolutionary, I would say) plan over the board usually requires a lot of energy. Besides, the natural creative joy after having worked out the general features is an additional source of stress.

This explains why Spassky's play in the next phase of the game is rather hesitant. It is clear that he had intended the exchange sacrifice on b4 from the moment he played 15...b6; otherwise his whole queenside play would have made little sense, leaving the a5-pawn weak and helping White develop his attack on that side of the board. However, he didn't choose the best concrete way of crowning his plan.

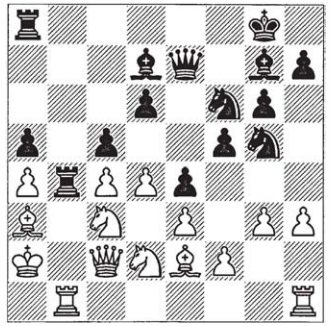
Better is 19...♖b4! not fearing 20 ♘xa5 (the only attempt to take advantage of Black's move-order) 20...c5 21 ♘b3 ♖bxa4! 22 ♘xa4 ♗xa4 with a strong attack; for instance, 23 ♖a1 ♘d8 and the knights intend to march in tandem to d8/d7 and c6/b6. With his last move, Spassky manifested his intention to wait for White to play ♖b1 before planting his own rook on b4, but weakened the a2-g8 diagonal and drives the knight away from the queenside.

20 ♖b1 ♖b4 21 ♘d2?!

This is similar to positional capitulation. Black's inaccuracy could have been exploited with 21 c5! as suggested by Korchnoi. One of his lines continues 21...♗e6 (the point is that the otherwise desirable move 21...d5 would allow 22 ♗xb4; with the long dark diagonal safely blocked, White would easily repel the attack with 22...axb4 23 ♘d1 ♖xa4+ 24 ♔b2 followed by ♖a1) 22 cxd6 ♕f7 23 ♖hc1 c5 24 ♗xb4 axb4 25 ♘b5 ♘d7 26 ♔b2 c4 27 ♕xc4! ♗xc4 28 ♗xc4 ♘e6 29 ♘c7 ♖e8 30 a5 with strong compensation for the queen. Although there is a lot of room for improvements, it is clear that the position is double-edged. "Unlike in the game" as Korchnoi laments.

21...c5 *(D)*

W



Black has managed to consolidate on the dark squares. Even if it did not lead to an immediate loss of the a4-pawn, White could not seriously consider taking on b4: the pressure on the long diagonal and the a-file would be too strong.

22 d5

Korchnoi tries to keep the position closed, although he will not manage to build a reliable fortress. Tal gives the following line: 22 dxc5 dxc5 23 ♘b5 ♘f7 24 ♖bd1 ♘e5 25 ♘b1 ♘d3! 26 ♗xd3 exd3 27 ♖xd3 ♘e4 (27...♖xc4! is even better) with a strong attack.

22...h5 23 ♘b5 ♘f7

A clear sign that, apart from its tactical drawbacks, 19...♘g5 was not a very useful move.

24 ♖bd1 ♘e5

Black has a clear advantage. As Korchnoi points out, Spassky should have transferred one of the knights to b6, putting White in a critical situation. The rest of the game is not too relevant; Spassky played without a clear plan (see the comment on the 19th move) and even allowed his opponent a tactical win at one point. Korchnoi missed his chance and the game was

adjourned; later, Spassky managed to convert his advantage into a win.

We shall now examine the other extreme situation: instead of using a vanguard of pawns, the attacker throws his pieces into the front line of the battle. Such an approach can be successful if the opponent's position already contains major weaknesses, but against a compact structure combined with a cold-blooded defence it is likely to fail. Let's see two typical examples.

Korchnoi – Karpov
Baguio City Wch (21) 1978

1 c4 ♘f6 2 ♘c3 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 d4 ♗e7 5 ♗f4

This variation puts less pressure on the black centre than the more popular 5 ♗g5, but is not without poison. White intends to develop his pieces naturally and to keep a solid pawn-structure, which generally leaves him with the easier middlegame play.

5...0-0 6 e3 c5 7 dxc5 ♗xc5 8 ♕c2 ♘c6 9 ♖d1 ♕a5 10 a3 ♖e8 *(D)*

W

Igor Zaitsev has been 'responsible' for several explosive novelties introduced in practice by Karpov throughout his career. 11...dxc4 from Timman-Karpov, Montreal 1979 and 11 ♘g5 from the tenth game of the match against Korchnoi in Baguio 1978 are two of the most famous. A general characteristic of these new ideas was a dangerous attack started like thunder from a blue sky and carried out mainly with the pieces.

Although played one move earlier than the previously mentioned novelties, 10...♖e8 is no exception from the general rule. The only difference is that White's position is solid enough to resist such a radical plan.

11 ♘d2 e5 12 ♗g5 ♘d4

This is the key move in Zaitsev's plan. 12...d4? loses material without sufficient compensation: 13 ♘b3 ♕b6 14 ♘a4 ♗b4+ 15 axb4 ♕xb4+ 16 ♘d2.

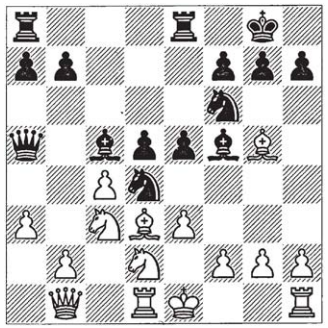
13 ♕b1!

Karpov's team might have underestimated this cold-blooded move. They might have relied on Korchnoi's legendary readiness to accept any material sacrifice, but underestimated his capacity to find the best move in a given situation. After 13 exd4?! Filip gives 13...exd4+ 14 ♘e2 ♘e4 with strong compensation. In his best games collection, Korchnoi continues the variation with a few more moves: 15 ♗h4 ♗f5 16 b4 ♕xa3 17 bxc5 d3 18 ♕c1 ♕a5 19 f3 ♘c3 and Black is winning.

After the text-move, Black faces a difficult task: he has to maintain the initiative for a long time; otherwise, the weaknesses left behind by the pawns would leave White with a clear advantage. It is very instructive that the apparently active black knight, which marked the 'official' start of the assault, is now standing in the way of its own pawns: the reverse of the perfect attacking scenario mentioned before.

13...♗f5 14 ♗d3 *(D)*

B



14...e4

This apparently forceful move has the drawback of leaving the black bishop slightly misplaced on f5. It is possible that Karpov rejected 14...♗xd3 because it would further weaken the light squares. However, things would be not

entirely clear: 15 ♕xd3 ♘e4! (this move makes a significant difference compared to the game: the knight avoids the strategically unpleasant threat ♗xf6 and leaves the bishop out of play on g5) and then:

a) 16 cxd5 ♘xg5 seems to work out well for Black; for instance, 17 b4 ♕xa3 18 bxc5 ♖ad8 and the pressure becomes stronger and stronger. The immediate threat is ...♖xd5 while 19 h4 is strongly met by 19...♘ge6! when the knight seems to be taboo: 20 dxe6?! ♘f3+ 21 ♘xf3 ♖xd3 22 ♖xd3 e4 23 exf7+ ♔xf7 with a material advantage for Black.

b) 16 ♘cxe4 dxe4 17 ♕xe4 ♘b3 18 ♕c2 ♘xd2 19 ♖xd2. Filip assesses that White has a clear advantage here, but things are not so simple. Black can shut the white bishop out of play with 19...f6 20 ♗h4 and then start an attack against the c4-pawn, taking advantage of the slightly unfavourable white queenside structure: 20...♗f8 (or 20...♗e7!? overprotecting f6) 21 0-0 ♖ac8. In a certain sense, the situation would be similar to the game: even if White loses the pawn back, he will have nice control of the light squares. The significant difference is that the white bishop faces serious problems coming back into play; the most desirable way to do that would be ♗xf6!, but this is not so simple to achieve; for instance, 22 ♖d7 (this could be premature; 22 ♖fd1 might be a better idea and in principle I would prefer White) 22...♕a6 23 b3 ♖ed8 24 ♖fd1 ♖xd7 25 ♖xd7 ♕xa3 26 ♗xf6? ♖c7!.

15 ♗c2

Korchnoi mentions that 15 ♗f1 might be even stronger, because Black would lose material; from a practical point of view, however, the game continuation is better.

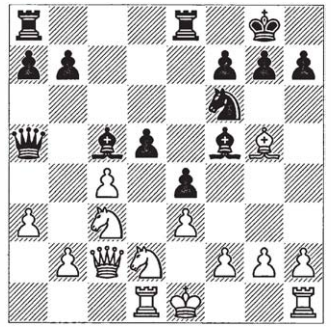
15...♘xc2+ 16 ♕xc2 *(D)*

Black has been forced to exchange his apparently strong knight; this marks the end of the attack. He is not under immediate danger, but White has very pleasant play around the numerous squares weakened as a consequence of the early aggression.

16...♕a6

Karpov is concerned about preventing his kingside structure from being spoiled with ♗xf6; other moves also fail to equalize: 16...d4?! 17 ♘b3 d3 18 ♘xa5 dxc2 19 ♖c1 winning a pawn; or 16...dxc4 17 ♗xf6 gxf6 when White has the

B



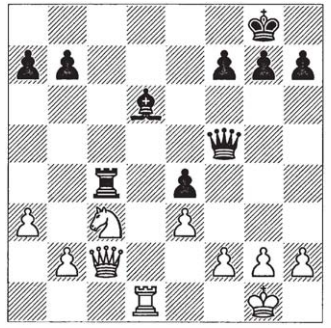
strong 18 0-0! threatening ♘xc4, ♘d5, ♘xe4 or even b4 (Korchnoi).

17 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 18 ♘b3 ♗d6 19 ♖xd5 ♖e5 20 ♘d4 ♖c8 21 ♖xe5 ♕xe5 22 ♘xf5 ♕xf5 23 0-0

With the king still in the centre, 23 ♕xe4? would be bad: 23...♕xe4 24 ♘xe4 ♖xc4 25 ♘c3 ♗xa3! with an advantage for Black.

23...♖xc4 24 ♖d1 *(D)*

B



Underlining Black's lack of coordination.

24...♕e5

This move has been unanimously criticized, but Korchnoi demonstrates that other continuations wouldn't have solved Black's problems: 24...♗e7 25 ♖d4! ♖xd4 26 exd4 ♕g5 27 ♘xe4 ♕d5 28 ♘g3! (Filip only gives the line 28 ♕d3?! ♕a2 with equality) 28...♕xd4 29 ♘f5 ♕d8 30 ♘xe7+ ♕xe7 31 ♕c8+ ♕f8 32 ♕xb7 with a winning endgame; or 24...♗f8 25 ♖d8 with an obvious advantage for White.

25 g3 a6 26 ♕b3 b5 27 a4 ♖b4 28 ♕d5 ♕xd5 29 ♖xd5 ♗f8 30 axb5

White won a pawn and, 30 moves later, the game.

The following example is not without mistakes but in general terms it features a similar picture. The game was played shortly before Tony's premature death.

Miles – Marin
Internet rpd 2001

1 d4 d6 2 ♘f3 f5 3 ♗f4 ♘f6 4 e3

I have had the occasion to play several games with Tony, both over the board and on the Internet. I noticed that he usually aimed for solid pawn-structures; although his openings sometimes seemed a bit unpretentious, in the long term they gave him the possibility of proving his excellent technique. Some readers might protest, mentioning the good old days when Tony was the noble knight of the Sicilian Dragon. I would answer that in the Dragon the dangers are of a tactical nature, but from a structural point of view, Black has no weaknesses; therefore, this cannot be considered an exception in Tony's creative universe.

4...g6 5 h3 ♗g7 6 c4 0-0 7 ♘c3 ♘c6 8 ♗e2 ♘e4 *(D)*

W

The safest method of equalizing. Black opens the diagonal of the bishop, so that he can play the thematic ...e5. However, the game took a rather unexpected course:

9 ♘xe4?! fxe4 10 ♘d2 ♘xd4!

Tony missed tricks like this surprisingly often, especially in his last years. However, his usually solid structure acted in a similar way to the acrobat's safety-net, avoiding fatal consequences even in case of an accident.

11 ♘xe4 ♗f5 12 ♗d3 d5

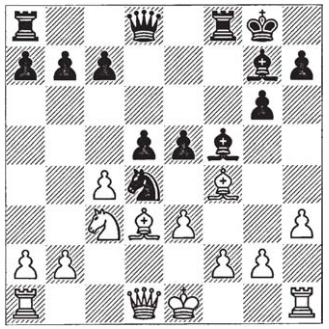
Carried away by the euphoria, I started advancing my pawns, without even considering the possibility of moving a piece backwards. It might have been wiser to play 12...♘e6 (as we shall see, this is not a signal for retreat; the knight only clears the way for the d-pawn with tempo) 13 ♕d2 d5 (13...♘xf4 leads to an equal position after 14 exf4 ♗h6 15 ♘g5) 14 ♘c3 d4! and Black maintains the initiative.

13 ♘c3

The best way to maintain the stability of the position. After 13 cxd5 ♕xd5 14 ♖c1 ♘e6! or 13 ♘c5 b6 Black is clearly on top.

13...e5 *(D)*

W



The situation is similar to what we saw in the game Korchnoi-Karpov: although invulnerable for the moment, the knight stands in the pawn's way without creating any concrete threat.

14 ♗h2?!

This looks a bit like playing with fire. Tony wanted to keep his bishop on a safe square, but leaving the g2-square without sufficient defence is rather risky with development incomplete. Safer is 14 ♗g3 when Black has to find the following path to approximate equality: 14...♗xd3 15 ♕xd3 e4 16 ♕d1 (the more ambitious 16 ♕d2 ♘f5 17 cxd5 is strongly answered by 17...♘xg3 18 fxg3 ♗xc3 followed by 19...♕g5) 16...♘f5! 17 ♕xd5+ ♕xd5 18 cxd5 ♘xg3 19 fxg3 ♗xc3+ 20 bxc3 ♖f5 and White's extra pawn doesn't have too much significance.

14...♕g5! 15 ♗g3 dxc4?

I wanted to keep the knight on d4 for as long as possible, without understanding that my resources would soon come to an end. Black obtains a strong initiative after 15...♗xd3 16 ♕xd3 e4 17 ♕d2 ♘f5 18 ♕xd5+ ♔h8 19 ♘xe4 ♕e7 when the threats ...♖ae8, ...♖ad8, ...♗xb2 and ...♘xg3 don't allow White to consolidate. For instance, against 20 ♗f4 the knight can return to its favourite square with great effect: 20...♘d4! when the threat 21...c6 is hard to meet.

16 ♗xc4+ ♔h8 17 0-0!

My hopes were mainly connected with lines such as 17 exd4 exd4 18 ♘e2 d3 19 ♘c3 ♖ae8+ 20 ♔f1 ♗d4, when Black has a very strong attack. Much to my disappointment, Tony thought for only a few seconds before getting his king into safety, leaving my knight looking stupid in the centre of the board.

17...♘c2 18 ♖c1 *(D)*

Simple and effective play again. White didn't need the complications arising after 18 e4 ♘xa1 19 exf5 gxf5 20 ♕xa1 f4.

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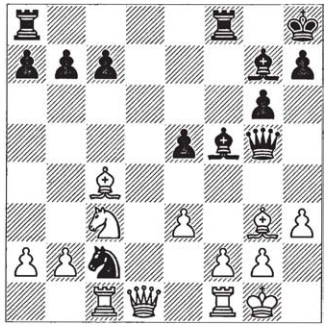

After the text-move, the game is over from a strategic point of view. It is, however, instructive to follow Tony's skill in taking advantage of his better structure in a simple position.

18...♖ad8

18...♘xe3 fails to 19 ♕d2!.

19 ♕e2 ♘b4 20 ♖fd1 e4 21 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 22 ♖d1 h5

Trying to secure my e-pawn. 22...c6 is met by 23 ♗f4 ♕e7 24 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 25 g4.

23 ♗xc7 ♖xd1+ 24 ♕xd1 ♗xh3

This move maintains the material balance, but doesn't solve Black's main problem, the weakness of the e-pawn.

25 ♗f1 ♗f5

25...♗xc3 26 bxc3 ♘d3 leaves Black's first two ranks undefended, which gives the move 27 ♕a4 a decisive character.

26 ♗d8! ♗f6 27 ♗xf6+ ♕xf6 28 ♕a4 ♘c6 29 ♗c4

There is no way to defend the pawn now.

29...♕d6 30 ♗d5 ♘e7?

Euthanasia!

31 ♕d4+ ♔h7 32 ♗g8+ 1-0

Let's consider now that the attack is carried out 'by the rules'. The pawns are advanced towards the enemy position and the pieces are ready to intervene. In case of superficial examination, situations with pawns in contact can generate dangerous optical illusions. The attacker is often tempted to think that establishing a direct conflict between his and the opponent's pawns should be enough to open lines for his pieces. There is no general rule about this, but practice has proved that, depending on each concrete situation, the defending side has a rich arsenal of tricks, helping him to cross the opponent's plans.

Let's start with a relatively simple example.

B

Marin – Draško
Sofia tt 1986

Black has almost completed his development and has a solid pawn-structure. He has managed to weaken the dark squares on the white kingside. His queen is in an advanced but slightly uncomfortable position. Therefore, Draško decided to open more lines on that side.

13...h5

He might have missed my next move, but there was no time to follow Nimzowitsch's advice about 'imprisoning' the g4-pawn. After 13...g5 White continues 14 ♗d2 and the attack doesn't work tactically: 14...h5 15 ♗e1 hxg4 16 ♕xf6! winning material for White.

What can White do after the text-move? The apparently forced 14 gxh5 ♖xh5 would not only open the h-file for an attack, but also allow strong pressure against the centre along the fourth and fifth ranks. After 15 e4 Black is not forced to take the pawn right away (15...♗xc3 16 bxc3 ♕xe4 17 ♕g3 gives White some compensation). He could simply play 15...0-0-0, maintaining all the threats (...♗xc3 followed by ...♕xe4 or ...g5-g4) and creating new ones (...♘b6 attacking both the c4-bishop and the d4-pawn).

14 g5!

At the cost of one pawn, White not only prevents Black's activity, but wins a few important tempi for his own development. It will soon become clear that the only consequences of the move 13...h5 (apart from winning a pawn) are a complex of weaknesses (g5, g6, h5).

14...♕xg5 15 e4 ♕h4 16 ♗f4 *(D)*

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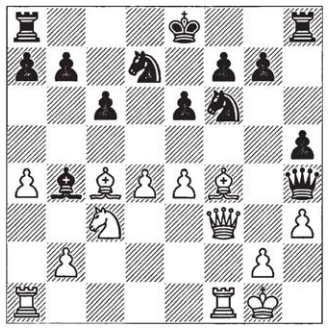


White has achieved perfect development and is ready to start an attack against the enemy king, wherever he decides to castle.

16...♖f8

Draško prophylactically defends the f7-pawn in order to castle queenside. In case of 16...0-0 the weaknesses of the kingside would have made themselves felt, as well as the exposed position of the queen: 17 ♖ad1 (overprotecting the d4-pawn is useful for many purposes; at some point, White might wish to play, for instance, ♗e5 followed by ♗g3; besides, after the immediate 17 ♕e3? Black has 17...e5!, when the lack of overprotection of the d4-pawn makes itself keenly felt) gives White a dominant position and various threats; for instance, 18 ♗e2 targeting the h5-pawn or 18 ♕e3 ♘h7 19 ♘a2 ♗a5 (19...♗e7 cuts off the way back for the queen, so White could play 20 ♔h2 preparing 21 g3) 20 ♗d6 ♖fe8 21 ♖f4 followed by ♖df1 with a strong initiative.

17 ♖ad1 0-0-0 18 ♕e3

In order to save the queen, the knight is forced to retreat to a passive position, making a central break possible.

18...♘h7 19 ♘a2 ♕e7 20 ♕b3 ♗a5 21 d5!

This typical advance will open more diagonals for the white bishops. Compare with the games Vaganian-Shirov and Efimov-Marin below; in our case, the d6-square is firmly under White's control. With such a disorganized army, Black will not be able to survive for too long.

21...exd5 22 exd5 ♘e5 23 ♗xe5 ♕xe5 24 dxc6 ♗b6+ 25 ♔h1 ♘f6 26 cxb7+ ♔xb7 27 a5 ♕xa5 28 ♘b4 ♘e4 29 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 30 ♖xf7+ ♔b8 31 ♘c6+ 1-0

In his *Secrets of Modern Chess Strategy*, John Watson presents, on the basis of the games Fischer-Spassky and Yusupov-Karpov, a typical modern method of playing against doubled pawns. At one point, he writes "the player fighting against the doubled pawns allows their liquidation in order to exploit the weak squares which they leave behind". I invite you now to follow a game where a very ingenious way of defending against such a plan was shown.

Ponomariov – Kramnik
Linares 2003

1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 g6 4 ♗xc6 dxc6

For somebody who has played the Berlin Defence in so many games against Kasparov, these pawns are not supposed to be such an intolerable weakness...

5 h3 ♗g7 6 d3 ♘f6 7 ♘c3 ♘d7 8 ♗e3 e5 *(D)*

Finally, the pawn-structure has been more or less established and we can take a general look at the position. Compared to a similar position

W

which can arise from the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez (after an eventual ...c5), the disposition of the black doubled pawns seems worse here: the c6-square is denied to the black knight while the b6-square is slightly weak. However, we shall see that the knight has the fantastic square e6 at his disposal, although it will temporarily interfere with the bishop. Moreover, the weakness of b6 will be much harder to exploit than expected.

For the moment, White seems to enjoy a pleasant game. He can choose between plans on both wings: a3 and b4 or ♘h2 and f4. At certain moments (after, for example, a3 and ...a5) he could transfer the knight to c4, putting serious pressure on the black queenside. Both black bishops seem rather passive, while the doubled pawns are likely to be a permanent source of worry.

Black's trumps are slightly less obvious. First of all, control over the d4-square is very important. At some point, the knight could jump there; if White exchanged it, then instead of doubled pawns Black would have a spatial advantage in the centre (although the conclusions of an older game Adams-Kramnik, Las Vegas FIDE 1999, suggest Black should be prudent: White's minor pieces might prove stronger in a fixed structure). The bishop-pair is also not to be underestimated because in order to make progress, White is supposed to open the position. One more thing: although the white knights occupy very natural squares for the moment, they don't yet have any stable outposts. A time will come in this game when they are the most passive pieces on the board.

9 ♕d2 h6!?

A very ambitious move. At the cost of giving up, at least for the moment, the possibility of castling, Black severely restricts the activity of White's minor pieces. Paradoxically, during the game it is not clear at all who will be more restricted in his actions by Black's impossibility of castling: in order to prevent ...0-0, White will have to keep his queen on d2, blocking the transfer of the king's knight to c4.

10 0-0 ♕e7

By defending the c5-pawn, Black prepares the transfer of the knight to the key square e6. To avoid being suffocated, White has to undermine Black's control over the centre. He can start with either the c5- or the e5-pawn.

11 a3

The alternative plan starts with 11 ♘h2, intending to play f4. There are certain risks involved, because the diagonal of the g7-bishop would be opened. Moreover, the queenside action looks very promising without any obvious drawback.

11...♘f8 12 b4

This is the moment described by Watson: White hopes to weaken the dark squares on the black queenside.

12...♘e6!

It would make little sense to open lines on the queenside. Besides, 12...cxb4 13 axb4 ♕xb4? does not work out well tactically: after 14 ♗xa7 the only way to avoid the loss of an exchange with ♗c5 is 14...b6, but this loses an important pawn to 15 ♖fb1.

13 ♘a4 *(D)*

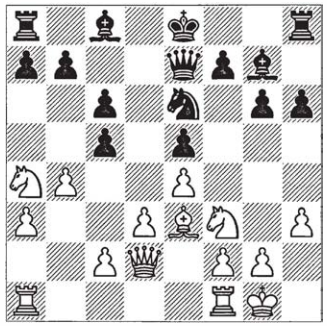
White has to insist in provoking ...cxb4. 13 bxc5 ♘xc5 is fine for Black: he has solved the problem of the doubled pawns without allowing White to take over the initiative on the queenside. After the text-move, it seems that White has succeeded in forcing a very favourable queenside configuration.

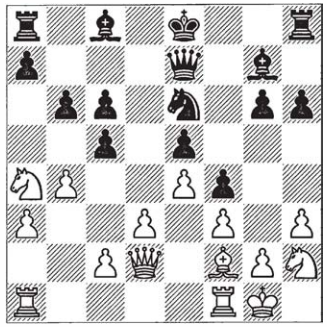
13...b6!!

This is a far from obvious move; at first sight it might seem that Black is accepting a permanent weakness on c5.

14 ♘h2

Ponomariov thought for a long time here. He might have needed some time to understand that 14 bxc5 is answered by 14...b5! forcing the knight to retreat to a very passive position. I don't know whether Kramnik found the idea





himself during his home preparation (he had played relatively quickly up to this point) or if he knew the following game played by two obscure Siberian masters: 15 ♘b2 f5 16 exf5 gxf5 17 ♕c1 0-0!? 18 ♗xh6 e4 19 dxe4 fxe4 20 ♘h2 ♕f6 21 ♗xg7 ♕xg7 22 f4 ♘xf4 23 ♖xf4 ♗xh3 24 g4 ♕e5! and Black won in Kabanov-Starosek, Omsk 2001.

This is a concrete illustration of Tarrasch's axiom about knights on the edge of the board. For instance, b3 would be a much better square from which to put pressure on c5, but, as mentioned, the queen blocked the transfer for the f3-knight. This is a detail that should have been taken into account in the first moment of considering the possibility of a queenside attack, because once the action was started, it was already too late to step aside.

Anyway, I failed to find a concrete idea behind Ponomariov's last move. He was probably preparing against ...♘d4, when he could have continued f4.

14...f5!

With both white knights passively placed, this move doesn't involve any risk.

15 f3

This looks like positional capitulation. While the a4-knight is 'just' awkwardly placed, his colleague will be buried alive on h2.

15...f4 16 ♗f2 *(D)*

16...h5!

Having secured for a while the kingside at such a high price, White has to make some progress on the queenside. Black shouldn't be in a hurry to attack; the best strategy is to meet White's possible counterplay in the best possible way. Rushing in with ...g5, ...h5, ...g4, looks out of place: the h2-knight would suddenly become a useful defensive piece.

The idea behind 16...h5 is to cut out forever any active possibilities for the knight and to prepare the exchange of the dark-squared bishops with ...♗f6-h4. Yes, just like in the King's Indian, this potentially strong piece in the previous play is in danger of becoming passive after the position has been blocked.

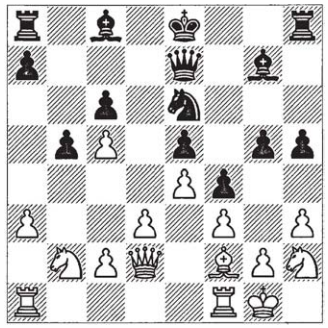
17 bxc5

White can try to fight for control of the d5-square; for instance: 17 ♖ab1 ♗f6 18 c4 (after 18 bxc5 b5 19 ♘b2 ♗h4 the c5-pawn has lost its support) 18...cxb4! (the careless 18...♗h4?! leads to problems: 19 ♗xh4 ♕xh4 20 bxc5 bxc5 21 ♕a5 ♕e7 and now 22 ♘b6!) 19 axb4 ♗h4 20 ♗xh4 ♕xh4 21 ♘c3 ♕e7 22 b5 and now Black probably has many ways of reacting, but even the apparent concession 22...c5 23 ♘d5 ♕f7 leaves him with a long-term advantage: the plan is ...♘d4, ...g5 and ...♖b8-b7; sooner or later the white king will come under attack. The beautiful knight on d5 is a pale consolation for the other defects of the position and the lack of a concrete plan for White.

We can see now the depth of Kramnik's previous move: the exchange of the bishops would have favoured him in most cases.

17...b5 18 ♘b2 g5 *(D)*

Not, of course, 18...♘xc5? 19 ♕c3 ♗f8 20 d4 with unnecessary complications. Confronted with a new situation, Kramnik adjusted his plan: the position in the centre has become shaky again and 18...♗f6 might be too slow in view of 19 a4 (or even 19 d4 in a better form than in the game, because the f4-pawn has less defence and the f6-bishop is more exposed).



19 d4?

Something had to be done, of course, for that poor b2-knight, but 19 a4 is a better way: 19...0-0 20 axb5 cxb5 21 c4 with some chances to survive. White's material advantage is, of course, just a partial compensation for the passivity of the h2-knight in an open position.

19...exd4

19...♘xd4 20 ♗xd4 exd4 21 ♘d3 0-0 isn't too bad either, but Kramnik had calculated concrete variations.

20 ♘d3 ♘xc5! 21 ♘xc5

After 21 ♘b4 ♗b7 White cannot capture the d-pawn: 22 ♗xd4? 0-0-0 23 c3 ♘b3 winning a pawn and an exchange after ...♘xd4.

21...♕xc5 22 ♖fd1

White will win the pawn back and initiate major simplifications. However, this will only accentuate his problems, since his only minor piece left on the board will be precisely the worst one.

22...♗e6 23 ♕b4

Ponomariov was not too willing to play the endgame after 23 ♗xd4 ♗xd4+ 24 ♕xd4 ♕xd4+ 25 ♖xd4 ♔e7, when Black would start to push his queenside majority. Moreover, the white kingside pawns will become potential weaknesses in case of the exchange of all the rooks.

23...♕b6

23...♕xb4 24 axb4 is a serious concession, because the queenside pawns have lost their mobility. The cheap trick 24...d3 doesn't help too much: 25 cxd3! ♗xa1 26 ♖xa1 followed by ♗c5 and d4, and White's position is impossible to break.

24 a4

Still hoping to create some confusion. After 24 ♗xd4 ♗xd4+ White has to exchange queens like in a previous note, since 25 ♖xd4? is impossible because of 25...c5; the active 24 ♕d6? is parried by the simple 24...c5!, when White can resign.

24...c5!

Very elegant play by Kramnik again. He cuts out any possible forms of counterplay, such as 24...♗c4 25 a5 ♕c7 26 ♕c5 ♕e7 27 ♕f5 planning h4.

25 ♕xb5+ ♕xb5 26 axb5 ♔f7

Following the latest developments, the white bishop has become just as passive as the knight. The whole queenside has fallen under Black's control.

27 ♖a5 ♖hb8

It might seem that the weaknesses on a7 and b5 balance each other out. There are, however, two important aspects regarding this:

1) The exchange of these weaknesses would allow a black rook to penetrate with decisive effect to White's first or second rank.

2) Given the difference in activity between both sides' minor pieces, White will most likely lose the b5-pawn rather than exchange it.

Kramnik went on to win quite convincingly.

Central pawn breaks are typical in many closed openings. In Catalan-like structures for instance, they are usually intended to lengthen the diagonal of the fianchettoed bishop. We shall now follow two games where a suitable defence against such a plan was employed.

Vaganian – Shirov
Manila OL 1992

White has some advantage in the centre but is slightly behind in development. With his next move, Vaganian shows his intention to unblock the central pawns.

12 ♘d2 ♘d6!?

Not a very typical square for the knight. Shirov takes preventive measures against the advance of the white pawns. 12...♘xc3 13 bxc3 just strengthens White's centre, while 12...♘xd2 13 ♗xd2 helps White's development, because 13...♕xb2 only makes things worse after 14 e4 ♗g6 15 ♖ab1 followed by ♖xb7.

13 e4?!

By playing this stereotyped move, Vaganian seems to have overlooked or at least underestimated Black's hidden idea. As Shirov pointed out, White should have continued his development with 13 b3 a5 14 ♗a3 ♖fe8 15 ♖ac1 preparing to occupy important squares such as c5, c4 or e5 with his minor pieces, underlining at the same time the unnatural position of the black knight.

13...♗g6 14 ♘b3 a5! *(D)*

W

Suddenly, the central pawns as well as the entire queenside are under serious pressure. Vaganian decides to make a central break in the hope of opening the diagonal of his light-squared bishop, but this is exactly what Black was perfectly prepared for.

15 d5

15 ♗e3 isn't a solution because of 15...♕b4 with the multiple threats of ...a4, ...♘c4 and ...♕c4.

15...cxd5 16 exd5 e5!

Such moves are easy to overlook when making long-term plans. The fianchettoed bishop is more passive than ever, while the d6-knight is a perfect blockader. In fact, most of White's minor pieces are more passive and more exposed than the black ones.

17 ♗h3 f5

Later, Shirov was dissatisfied with this move and suggested 17...♖fd8 when ♗xd7 followed by ♕xe5 would always run into ...♗f6 followed by ...a4-a3. However, I don't think there can be anything wrong with the text-move: White has no convenient way to take advantage of the weakness on e6.

18 ♗e3 ♕b4 19 ♖ac1 a4 20 ♘a1 ♖fc8 21 ♖fd1 a3!

Black has a clear advantage and went on to win the game.

We shall now see the application of the same plan starting from less favourable circumstances:

B

Efimov – Marin
Andorra 1993

White has a promising position. His pawn-structure is better and he can prepare either the minority attack (b4-b5) or a break in the centre (d5).

15...♘e8!?

The transfer of the knight to d6 is aimed at meeting both positional threats in an efficient way. First of all, the squares b7 and b5 are defended. Moreover, a blockade against the white d-pawn is prepared in advance. White would get a dangerous initiative after 15...a4?! 16 b4! axb3 17 ♖xb3 ♕c7 18 ♖fb1 ♖a7 19 ♘c3 threatening ♘b5. In case of a queen move, White would continue strengthening his position with a4.

16 ♖fc1?!

Under the new circumstances, White decides to concentrate on threatening d5, failing to anticipate Black's idea. The alternative is 16 b4 axb4 17 axb4; for instance, 17...♘d6 (better than 17...♖a4 18 ♕c2! ♖xb4 19 ♕xf5 with the better pawn-structure for White; when making his choice, Efimov might have missed 18 ♕c2) 18 ♕c5 ♕a6 and now 19 ♘f4 (19 ♘c3 is less precise because of 19...♘e4! 20 ♕xe7 ♘xc3 when Black has avoided the immediate dangers connected with b5 or d5) seems the best way to prepare a sacrificial b5 advance, and Black still faces an unpleasant defensive task; for instance: 19...♖fe8 20 b5 cxb5 (20...♘xb5 21 ♕xf5 is again more pleasant for White) 21 ♘d5 ♖ac8 22 ♕b4 ♗f8 23 ♖a1 ♘e4 24 ♖xa6 ♗xb4 25 ♖b6 and the minority attack has succeeded.

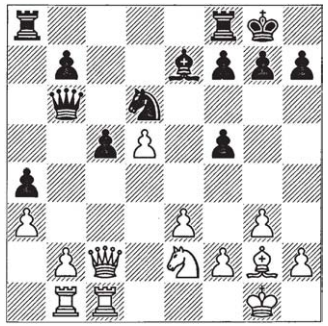
16...♘d6 17 ♕c2 a4

With the b7-pawn safely defended, this move is entirely playable.

18 d5 c5! *(D)*

At the price of a pawn, Black solves all his strategic problems. The white bishop is left without scope, while the knight is a strong blockading piece. Besides, the presence of the opposite-coloured bishops makes a draw most probable. Efimov probably considered 18...cxd5 to be forced, when 19 ♘c3 gives White plenty of play against the black weaknesses on f7, b7 and a4.

W



19 ♕xc5 ♕xc5 20 ♖xc5 ♗f6

By placing the weakness on b2 under observation, Black takes control of the c-file.

21 ♘c3 ♖fc8 22 ♖xc8+ ♖xc8 23 ♘xa4 ♖c2

White has won one more pawn, but his pieces are very passive now. Therefore, he has to return some material.

24 b3 ♖a2 25 ♘b6 ♖xa3 26 ♘c4 ♖a6 27 ♘xd6 ♖xd6 28 ♖c1 ♔f8 29 ♖c7 ♖b6 30 d6 ♖xd6 31 ♖xb7

With energetic play, Efimov managed to break the blockade while maintaining the extra pawn. However, Black is able to set up a fortress.

31...♗d8 32 ♖b5 g6 33 ♗d5 ♖b6 34 ♖c5 ♗e7 35 ♖c8+ ♔g7 36 ♖c7 ♔f8

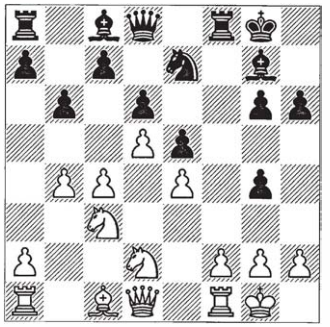
and White unsuccessfully tried for almost 50 more moves to advance the b-pawn before agreeing to a draw – it would be outside our subject to go into a detailed analysis.

My advice is to treat each position of this kind with great care. Concrete calculation is needed in order to identify all the opponent's possible reactions.

Exercises

8.1

W



Mulyar – Avrukh
Bratislava U-16 Wch 1993

We have a typical position with a blocked centre and attacks on opposite wings. How should White continue his attack?

8.2

Kaev – Chistiakov
Kiev 1938

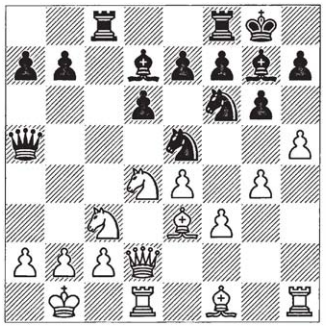
Black has a difficult position. His king is in danger while White has a strategic superiority as well. Chistiakov found the only way to continue the game:

25...h5!?

Instead, 25...♔h7 loses by force to 26 gxf5 gxf5 27 ♘xf5! exf5 28 ♗xf5+ ♗g6 29 ♗xg6+ ♖xg6 30 ♖xg6 ♔xg6 31 ♕xc8.

After the text-move (25...h5), how would you continue the attack?

8.3



Christiansen – Marin
Internet rpd 2002

A sharp line of the Sicilian Dragon had been played. I initiated a typical tactical operation recommended by Chris Ward in his *Winning with the Dragon II*.

13...♘xf3 14 ♘xf3 ♖xc3 15 hxg6

Larry is not the kind of player to grab material and defend in a position like that arising after 15 ♕xc3 ♕xc3 16 bxc3 ♗xg4 followed by 17...♘xe4. He thought that he had found a clever way to breach my king's position first.

15...♘xe4 16 ♕h2

Is the position as bad as it looks for the black king?

9 Defensive Sacrifices

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.
(MATTHEW 18: 8, 9)

Around the middle of the 20th century, Botvinnik wrote that every piece has a 'nominal' and a 'relative' value. While the nominal value is always the same (for instance, one bishop = 3 pawns), the relative one can have dramatic variations.

One of the first things we learn in chess is the scale of nominal values; how many times during our first games of chess have we been told not to trade a strong piece for a weak one... Therefore, the respect for material is 'stored' in a zone of our brain similar to the computer's BIOS. The information (or revelation) about the relative values of the pieces comes much later, when it is more difficult to modify the 'BIOS'. Therefore, under the pressure of a practical game, the subconscious is liable to give priority to the initial information.

As already mentioned in Chapter 6 (Stalemate), the winning process of the attacking side usually consists of gradually reducing the opponent's degree of liberty. One of the most important methods used for this purpose is of a material nature: the defending side is forbidden (or, on the contrary, forced) to do certain things because otherwise he would lose a pawn or a piece. Although in most cases restrictions of this kind are real, we also find a surprising number of exceptions. Many promising positions have been spoiled because the attacking side relied too much on his threats of winning material, neglecting other factors such as the pawn-structure, the initiative, or piece coordination. However, a more common case for this chapter is that from all the possible evils, the loss of a small amount of material would be easiest to cope with. This can happen in many different ways; I shall try to enumerate some of the most important.

First of all, I would like to mention that the following paragraphs are not the result of abstract thinking; they are more of a synthesis made on the base of the examples analysed for this chapter.

The simplest form of sacrifice consists of an exchanging operation initiated by the defender. This is like playing with the cards on the table: the attacker has not the least doubt about his opponent's true intentions.

Quite different are cases where a long tactical operation is initiated (or allowed to happen), apparently containing a hole which permits the opponent to win material by means of a *zwischenzug* (or some other trick of this kind). This situation is rather confusing from a psychological point of view: the attacker is tempted to believe that his opponent has just blundered and that, logically, victory is not far off. As we shall see more than once, a mistaken evaluation is often the seed of future failure.

Of great artistic value are sacrifices made by putting (or leaving) a piece under attack, with such abstract purposes as improving the coordination of the rest of the army.

One common feature of all kind of sacrifices is that they tend to change the character of the position in a radical way. According to Steinitz's theory, one form of disadvantage is transformed into another of a different nature. From a practical point of view, this is of great importance. The opponent usually faces difficulties adapting to the new circumstances. For instance, he might continue 'attacking' for one or two more moves in what had meanwhile become a technical position. This might be sufficient to allow his advantage to evaporate completely.

Let's have a look at it from the other side. Once the correct defence, based on a sacrificial idea, has been found, the main problem is to cross the psychological barrier. If you manage to understand (or convince yourself) that a small material investment is not the end of the world, then everything becomes so logical and clear that any hesitation is easily removed. There are also less fortunate cases, when the defender changes his mind at the last moment, under the pressure of prejudices. The usual punishment comes as a catastrophic loss, which, combined with the thought over the missed opportunity, can sometimes adversely affect his play for the rest of the tournament.

I have classified the practical examples on material grounds (sacrifices of queen, exchange, minor piece and two pieces for rook). This is more than just a formal systematization; as we shall see, every kind of sacrifice is best suited for certain situations and purposes.

Moreover, each type of sacrifice seems to have a particular appeal to certain players, due to their style and temperament. Thus I have often focused on a world champion whose games often featured a particular type of sacrifice.

I have not included a chapter dedicated to pawn sacrifices. You can find them dispersed through Chapters 8 (The Soul of Chess) and 14 (Simplification).

10 Queen Sacrifices

From the wide range of possible sacrifices, the tactical operations where the strongest piece is offered on Caissa's altar are the most appreciated by both the public and experts. By 'queen sacrifice' we usually understand that the queen is exchanged for an amount of material worth slightly less than nine pawns, even though, objectively speaking, this shouldn't deserve a better evaluation on an aesthetic scale than a mere exchange sacrifice.

However, there is a certain magic about sacrificing the queen. We have all developed a deep respect for this powerful lady; her disappearance can create the same psychological effect as that of a general's sudden death caused by an enemy arrow fired over his army engaged in a fierce battle. Moreover, for the attacking side such sacrifices are the most unexpected and, logically, have the deepest psychological impact.

Another feature, of a more objective nature, is that in order to get an acceptable amount of material for a queen, a more complicated tactical operation is needed than, for instance, getting a knight and a pawn for a rook.

One of the common purposes of a queen sacrifice is to achieve a fortress, but these situations are covered Chapter 5 (Fortresses). Here we shall consider game fragments where the aim was to reduce the opponent's attacking potential or to launch a counterattack. We shall start with an example where a relatively simple operation came as a total surprise for the attacker.

In the following diagram, White has invested two pawns in his kingside attack; he also handed the control of several important dark squares to Black. There was no time for second thoughts.

26 e5+ ♔h8 27 exf6 ♗xh3 28 ♖g1!

White would get nothing after 28 fxg7+ ♕xg7 when, among others, the threat of ...♘f3 followed by ...♕a1+ is rather unpleasant.

After the text-move, things look pretty bad for Black.

W

Marin – Uhlmann
Dresden 1988

28...♗xf6!

I remember how surprised I was when I saw this move; I had just managed to calculate that the apparently forced 28...♖g8 29 fxg7+ ♖xg7 30 ♖xg7 ♔xg7 31 ♗f6+ followed by ♕xf4 leads to a decisive attack. By sacrificing the queen, Uhlmann managed to eliminate two of my most dangerous attacking pieces.

29 ♗xf6+ ♕xf6 30 ♘xf6 ♖xf6 *(D)*

W

As a result of the operation initiated with 26 e5+, Black has managed to retain a small material advantage, preserve his strong central

knight and transform the weak f4-pawn into a strong one. Demoralized by such a sudden transformation I failed to find the correct way of maintaining the initiative.

31 ♕f2?!

After this stereotyped move, Black manages to consolidate and only with great effort (and some luck) does White obtain a draw.

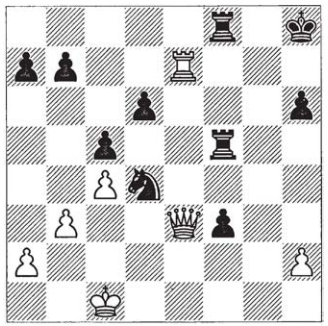
Much stronger is 31 ♕e1! threatening ♕h4, ♕e7 and ♕e4 at the same time. Because of his temporary lack of coordination, Black is forced to part with his f-pawn: 31...♖af8 (or 31...♗e6?! 32 ♕e4 ♖f7? 33 ♕g6 winning) 32 ♕e7 ♖8f7 (32...♖6f7? loses to 33 ♕h4) 33 ♕e8+ ♖f8 34 ♕h5 ♗f5 (again forced; if 34...♗e6 then 35 ♖g6!) 35 ♗xf5 ♘xf5 36 ♕g4 followed by ♕xf4. With his king exposed, Black has problems getting a fortress; White retains some winning chances.

31...♖af8 32 ♖e1 f3

White has serious problems now. His only hope is the open position of the black king.

33 ♖e7 ♗f5 34 ♗xf5 ♖xf5 35 ♕e3 *(D)*

B



This risky move ends up bringing White a rather undeserved draw, but unblocking the pawn is hardly a wise decision. It is better to capture on b7 when, if he wishes to make any progress, Black might have to offer the exchange of one pair of rooks, thus reaching a position similar to the final one of the game.

35...♖5f6 36 ♕e4 ♘f5 37 ♖e8 ♖xe8 38 ♕xe8+ ♔g7 39 ♕e4 ♘d4?

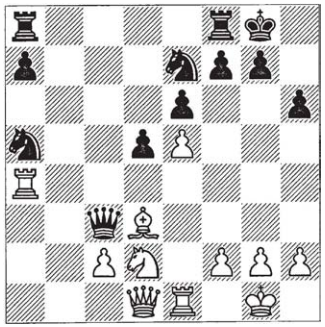
A typical phenomenon: the queen sacrifice has radically changed the course of the game and unexpectedly offered Black good winning chances. Not being entirely prepared to play for victory with all his strength, Uhlmann missed a neat win by 39...f2!!. The idea is to meet 40 ♕g2+ with 40...♘g3! 41 ♕xg3+ ♔f7.

40 ♕g4+

It took Uhlmann 10 more moves to convince himself that the king cannot escape the perpetual, and agree to a draw.

The queen sacrifice in the following game came as a result of an equally simple operation. However, the example is one of the most impressive I've ever seen on this theme, because of Black's iron logic in the preliminary phase leading to the sacrifice.

W



Nunn – Yusupov
Linares 1988

For the sacrificed pawn, White has an active position, better development and chances for a kingside attack. The weak squares on the c-file are not too relevant while there is a bishop on d3.

18 ♖e3 ♔h8!

The queen is Black's most active piece, and prevents White from including all his pieces in the attack. After the more passive 18...♕c7 White would get strong pressure with 19 ♕h5 followed by ♖g3, ♖h4, etc.

19 g4?!

This aggressive move is in fact the main cause of White's further difficulties. The weakness of the f4-square seems not to be too relevant with the board full of pieces; both the f4- and g6-squares are under control for the moment. However, as a consequence of Yusupov's precise play, the white bishop will soon have to be

transferred to other jobs and the a4-rook will be exchanged.

Yusupov recommends a more restrained approach: 19 ♘f3 (threatening ♗c4) 19...♖ab8! 20 h3. White's attacking chances are not then too great, but he has adequate compensation because of his more active pieces. If Black played as in the game (in fact, he cannot stay forever with that knight on the edge of the board) then White's chances would be relatively better because of his more flexible structure.

White can also drive the disturbing queen away with 19 ♗c4 but after 19...♕d4 20 ♗b3 ♕c5 his bishop is very passively placed.

19...♘ac6!

A flank operation is best answered with play in the centre. The e5-pawn is put under pressure.

20 ♘f3

By defending the pawn, White creates the threat of winning the queen with 21 ♗c4 ♕b2 22 ♖b3. With an insecure centre, 20 g5 is not such a dangerous attack: 20...♘xe5 21 gxh6 g5!? (or 21...g6!?) – Yusupov.

20...♖ab8! *(D)*

W

Another strong move, in accordance with Steinitz's principle of economy of resources in defence. Black parries the threat by continuing his development while creating the strong threat of ...♖b4, underlining the weakness of the f4-square. However, the move required some concrete calculation, because it causes the queen to be trapped. White's reaction is practically forced.

21 ♗c4 ♕b2 22 ♗b3 ♘g6!

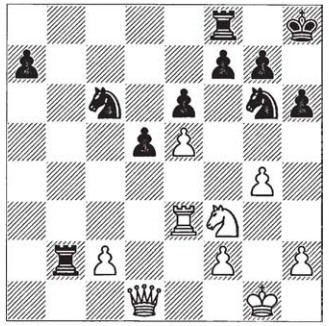
The same principle again. Because of the pressure on e5, White is forced to 'win' the queen right now, without the possibility of further strengthening his position.

23 ♖a2

White had no time for prophylaxis: 23 ♕e1 d4 24 ♖e4 (or 24 ♖d3 ♘f4) 24...♖xb3 25 cxb3 ♕xb3 and White's pieces are hanging. Or 23 ♔h1 (intending to meet 23...♘gxe5 with 24 ♖a2) 23...d4 24 ♖e4 d3! 25 ♕xd3 ♘gxe5 and Black is better.

23...♖xb3 24 ♖xb2 ♖xb2 *(D)*

W



An instructive moment. White has managed to convert some of his trumps into a slight material advantage. However, Black can also be satisfied: he has managed to eliminate two enemy pieces that were of crucial importance for the fight around the f4-square.

25 ♕c1?!

White didn't manage to adapt himself to the new situation. From a static point of view, Black has a fantastic position but his pieces are not entirely coordinated yet (for a similar situation, see also the game Marin-Anand, in Chapter 5, Fortresses). This fact enables White to maintain the balance by 25 ♖b3!, as suggested by Yusupov. In case of 25...♖xb3 26 cxb3 White has not only released the pressure by exchanging rooks, but also created a potential candidate for promotion: the b3-pawn. This limits Black's possibilities, because of the vulnerability of the a7-pawn. The critical line is 26...♘gxe5 (after the more passive 26...♖b8 27 ♕c2 ♖b6 {the careless 27...♘ge7 allows 28 g5!? h5 29 g6} 28 ♕c3 White might be slightly better) 27 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 28 f4 ♘g6 *(D)* (with the rook still passive,

the knight should go to this relatively stable square) and now White has a choice:

W

a) 29 f5 is rather risky. After 29...♘f4 the exposed position of the white king helps Black to get stability for his pieces: 30 ♕e1 (trying to prevent ...e5) 30...♖c8! (threatening ...♖c1) 31 ♕e3 (after 31 fxe6 ♘xe6 Black manages to defend all his pawns and retains the better position) 31...e5! 32 ♕xa7 (32 ♕xe5? loses to 32...♖c1+ 33 ♔f2 ♘d3+) 32...f6 and Black's connected pawns look more dangerous than White's b3-pawn.

b) 29 ♕d4 seems better, attacking the a7-pawn and also threatening f5. Rather than looking for a way to defend the a-pawn, Black should fight for the stability of his knight by 29...f5!?, when the position becomes very sharp, but is probably balanced. Black's safety zone is quite wide, since the position with queen + h-pawn vs rook + g7-pawn would be a draw. 30 gxf5 (30 ♕xa7 wins a tempo, but after 30...fxg4 the g4-pawn could take part in building dangerous nets around the king; the position remains unclear: 31 b4 ♘xf4 32 b5 d4 33 b6 d3) 30...♖xf5 31 ♕xa7 ♘xf4 32 b4 d4 33 ♔f1 and the least Black can do is play at some point ...♘d5 to sacrifice the knight for the passed pawn.

25...♖b4!

Yusupov doesn't allow his opponent a second chance. The careless 25...♖fb8?! allows 26 ♖b3!.

26 h3 ♖fb8 27 ♔h2

It is now too late for White to play 27 ♖b3. With his pieces coordinated, Black would simply reply 27...♖xb3 28 cxb3 ♖xb3 29 ♕xc6 ♖xf3 fully taking advantage of the kingside weaknesses. The best White could do is trade his e5-pawn for the a7-pawn and suffer for a long time.

27...a5 28 ♔g3 ♖c4

Preventing 29 h4 because of 29...♖bb4.

29 c3?!

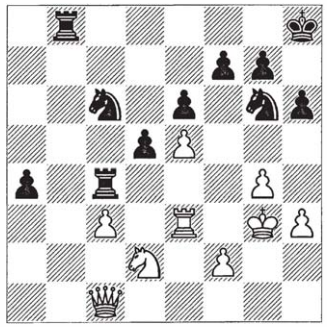
Yusupov recommends 29 ♘d2 ♖a4 30 ♘f3 inviting Black to show a concrete plan of improving his position.

29...a4!

With the rook isolated on e3, this pawn is very dangerous now. Note that Black avoided the trap 29...d4? 30 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 31 ♕f1!.

30 ♘d2 *(D)*

B



30...♘cxe5!!

Another elegant sacrifice, with the purpose of keeping his pieces stably placed.

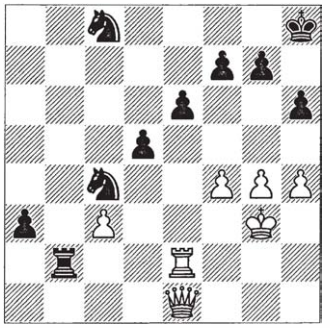
After the more natural 30...♖f4 White manages to confuse matters: 31 ♕a3 (not 31 h4? due to 31...♘cxe5!) 31...♖c8 32 h4 d4 (practically forced in order to save the rook) 33 ♖e4 ♖xe4 34 ♘xe4 ♘gxe5 35 cxd4 ♘xd4 36 ♕xa4 ♖c4 with a complicated but probably balanced position.

31 ♕a1

This must have been a difficult decision. Yusupov considers the position resulting after 31 ♘xc4 ♘xc4 32 ♖e2 a3 to be winning for Black (in principle, it would be nice to place the f4-square under control, but Black is not ready to play 32...e5?! because of 33 ♕d1! attacking both a4 and e5, and if 33...♘f4, 34 ♖xe5!). I think Yusupov is right, as Black's pawn is very dangerous, but I believe that more explanation is needed. White should play 33 f4 while still

allowed, when play could continue 33...♖b2 (33...♖b3 allows some counterplay with 34 f5) 34 ♕e1 (White should refrain from 34 ♖xb2 when after 34...axb2 35 ♕b1 the safest course is to bring the other knight to the queenside, beginning with 35...♘e7) 34...♘e7! (the start of a long manoeuvre; if the knight reaches b3 or c3, Black will be winning) 35 h4 ♘c8 *(D)* and now White has to create some counterplay, but it is not clear how:

W



a) 36 f5 e5 37 ♖xe5 ♘xe5 38 ♕xe5 a2 39 ♕e8+ ♔h7 40 ♕a4 ♘d6 (the knight is heading for c3, to make ...♖b1 possible) 41 ♕a7 ♘e4+ 42 ♔f3 ♘xc3 43 ♕xf7 (has White managed to create dangerous threats?) 43...♖b6! 44 ♕a7 ♖b1 45 f6 (not really!) 45...♖f1+ with an advantage for Black.

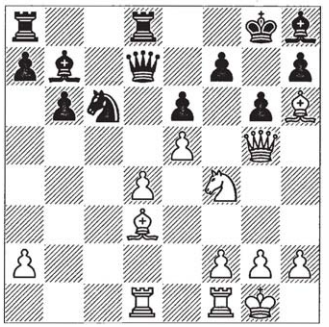
b) 36 g5 ♘8d6 37 g6 (37 gxh6 also fails to impress: 37...♘f5+ 38 ♔h3 ♘xh6 and Black has obtained some more squares; it is true that in this case the winning process would be quite long, with that knight on h6) 37...fxg6 38 ♖xe6 a2 and the black king is entirely safe, allowing the queenside mechanism to work perfectly.

31...♖c7 32 ♕xa4 ♖bc8 33 ♕a5 ♘c4 34 ♘xc4 ♖xc4

The position has been simplified in Black's favour. He has the more compact pawn-structure, with practically no weakness and perfect control of the numerous weaknesses in White's position. Yusupov went on to win a long game.

We shall now take a look at a more complex situation. In the next example, the sacrifice was the consequence of a complicated combination. The game was published in the press of the time with the winner's brief comments. The position was much more complicated than that and almost half a century later, Korchnoi suggested a whole series of interesting new ideas in his recently published best games collection.

W



Filip – Korchnoi
Bucharest 1954

White has built a strong attacking position and has several promising continuations at his disposal. Filip chose the apparently most energetic one:

19 d5

The wish to undermine e6 and subsequently g6 is natural, but a more static approach suggested by Korchnoi back in the 1950s is also possible: 19 ♗b5! accentuating the weakness of the kingside dark squares.

19...exd5 20 ♗b5

A typical moment: White bases his entire strategy on the exposed position of the black queen.

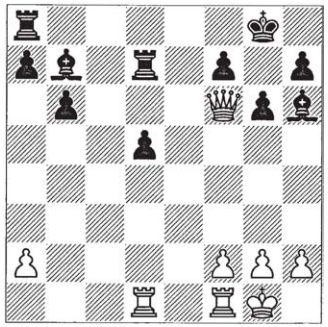
The main threats now are 21 ♘xd5 and 21 e6 fxe6 22 ♘xg6 hxg6 23 ♕xg6+ ♗g7 24 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 25 ♗xg7 ♕xg7 26 ♕xe6+. If Filip had foreseen the game continuation, he might have chosen 20 e6!? ♕e7 21 exf7+ ♕xf7 22 ♖fe1, which was recommended later by Korchnoi. The most important thing from a psychological point of view is that the character of the position would have remained the same, with White creating threats on the kingside.

20...♗xe5!

Korchnoi initiates a tactical operation, resulting in a queen sacrifice. This is the most practical decision: after the disappearance of

his strongest piece, he will also escape the problems connected with its exposed position!

21 ♗xc6 ♗xf4 22 ♕f6! ♗xh6 23 ♗xd7 ♖xd7 *(D)*



The position has changed radically. When playing *zwischenzugs* such as 22 ♕f6, a typical psychological mistake is to believe that the opponent has missed it. This usually results in a mistaken evaluation of the new situation and, subsequently, on an inappropriate plan.

Black has obvious compensation for the small material deficit. The bishop-pair is a powerful weapon, able to support the advance of the d-pawn a long way down the board. However, for the time being the light-squared bishop is rather passive; after an eventual exchange of rooks, it could also become exposed to attacks by the queen. The other bishop is more stable and defends the king's position rather well; therefore, it shouldn't be exchanged too readily for one of the enemy rooks.

24 ♖fe1 ♗f8

Preventing ♖e7.

25 h4

From a psychological point of view, this move is easy to understand: just a few moments ago, White was attacking on the kingside. Inertia in thinking is one of the most dangerous symptoms in such cases. Korchnoi gives a more logical plan, aiming to exchange all the rooks before the d-pawn becomes too dangerous.

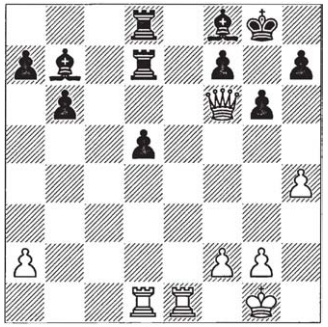
a) 25 ♖d3 was the move he analysed in this context:

a1) 25...♖ad8 (this was Korchnoi's main line) 26 ♖de3 d4 27 ♖e8 ♖xe8 28 ♖xe8 d3 29 ♖d8 ♖xd8 30 ♕xd8 ♗a6 31 ♔f1 with winning chances for White. It seems that, based on the unstable position of the light-squared bishop, the least White could achieve would be to liquidate the queenside pawns and get an endgame with three pawns against three on the kingside. A brilliant example of how to win this endgame is Polugaevsky-Geller, Skopje/Ohrid 1968.

a2) 25...♗b4 was given by Korchnoi as interesting, without any other comment. In fact, it seems that it is not too easy for White to double his rooks on the e-file; for instance, 26 ♖de3!? (26 ♖e5 is met by 26...♗d6, while 26 ♖e2 loses the exchange under more favourable circumstances for Black after 26...♗a6) 26...♗xe1 27 ♖xe1 d4! (an important tempo; Black prevents the move ♕d4, by which White could have gained chances for a kingside attack based on h4-h5) 28 ♖e7 ♖xe7 29 ♕xe7 ♗d5 30 a4 ♖c8! and the weakness of White's first rank allows Black to coordinate his pieces. Even if he lost the passed pawn, he would get his rook on a5, the bishop on e6 and the h-pawn to h5, with an impenetrable fortress.

b) 25 ♖e3!? may be an improved form of Korchnoi's suggestion. For instance, 25...♗c5 (the fortress arising after the more or less forced line 25...d4 26 ♖xd4 ♖xd4 27 ♕xd4 ♗c5 28 ♕d7 ♗xe3 29 ♕xb7 ♗xf2+ 30 ♔xf2 ♖e8 31 ♕xa7 ♖e6 probably wouldn't hold, mainly due to the weakness of the b6-pawn, which also restricts the rook along its third rank) 26 ♖d4 with a more favourable form for White of the idea presented in the comments to the next move.

25...♖ad8 *(D)*



Black has finally coordinated his pieces and threatens to push his pawn.

26 h5

White shouldn't have allowed the d-pawn to advance so easily. Stronger is 26 ♖d4, as suggested by Korchnoi, aiming for a blockade on the dark squares. However, I think that Black has a satisfactory defensive plan: 26...♗g7 27 ♕f4 h6!? (the white h-pawn shouldn't be allowed to reach h6; 27...♗xd4 28 ♕xd4 leaves the kingside seriously weakened, and 28...h5 isn't a reliable solution in view of 29 g4 hxg4 30 h5) 28 f3 (with his rook hanging on d4, White is in no position to fight for the c-file: 28 ♖c1 ♖e8 {threatening ...♗xd4 followed by ...♖e4 and ...d4} 29 f3 ♗a6 followed by ...♗c4) 28...♗a6 (the bishop is transferred to a better position) 29 ♖ed1 ♗c4 30 a4 a6 31 h5 g5 32 ♕f5 b5 33 axb5 axb5 34 f4 gxf4 35 ♕xf4 ♖e8 36 g4 ♖e5 and Black maintains his stability.

It is curious that having rejected 26 ♖d4, Filip soon blockaded the pawn on d3, under less favourable circumstances.

26...d4 27 hxg6 hxg6 28 ♖d3 ♗a6 29 ♖ed1?

White is panicking. After investing two tempi in opening the h-file, he doesn't even attempt to take advantage of it. Korchnoi gives an instructive line leading to a draw: 29 ♖h3 ♗g7 30 ♕c6 d3 31 ♖e8+ (at the last possible moment, White destabilizes Black's position) 31...♖xe8 32 ♕xd7 ♗b5! 33 ♕xb5 (as Korchnoi points out, there is not enough room for the queen on the d-file: 33 ♕d5 ♖e5 34 ♕d6? ♖e1+ 35 ♔h2 ♗e5+) 33...♖e1+ 34 ♔h2 d2 35 ♖d3 d1♕ 36 ♖xd1 ♖xd1 37 ♕a6 ♖d5 38 ♕xa7 ♖a5 eliminating the last danger: the a-pawn.

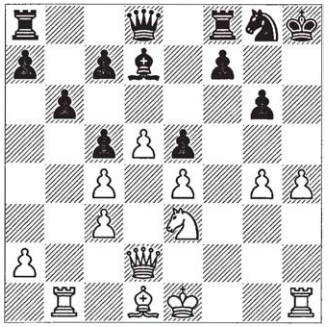
29...♗xd3

Black is, of course, happy to exchange this other bishop for the rook.

30 ♖xd3 ♖c8

Black is at least equal now from a material point of view and has a positional advantage because of his strong pawn. Korchnoi managed to win after a long fight.

In all the games examined up to now, despite their indisputable artistic value, the sacrifices could also be called exchanges; the nominal material investment didn't exceed the value of one pawn. We shall now examine a completely different case, where Black got far less material compensation for his queen. I remember how invigorating it was to follow live the fascinating events from this game; it gave me strength and energy to save a desperate endgame position on the top board of a dramatic match.



Bareev – Nisipeanu
Elista OL 1998

Bareev had played a good game so far, severely limiting Black's counterplay by means of subtle prophylactic moves. However, this had cost him a lot of energy and, even more important, time.

In the diagram position, White only needs a few more tempi to bring his queen's rook to the kingside in order to obtain a clearly winning position. Taking into account the approaching time-trouble and the slight temporary disorganization in White's camp, Nisipeanu opted for a radical change in the course of the events.

Later, when the game was over, it was discovered that his tactical operation could have been refuted. This doesn't reduce the idea's merit though. First of all, the practical problems, especially in time-trouble, proved too complicated to solve even for such an experienced player as Bareev. It happened all the time in Tal's games. Secondly, and in fact more importantly from a scientific point of view, the initial position is bad anyway; a passive strategy would have doubtless led to a slow death.

27...♕f6

Starting an attack against White's only weak point, e4. Black is in no condition to play 27...f5: after 28 h5 White gets his knight to f5 with devastating effect. 28...f4 29 hxg6+ ♔g7 30 ♘f5+ ♔xg6 31 ♕h2.

28 ♕g2 ♕f4 29 ♔d2!

In spite of placing the king on an exposed square, this is a very precise move, leaving the diagonal of the bishop open. Against 29 ♔e2 Nisipeanu intended to play 29...♘f6 30 ♔d3 ♘xe4! 31 ♕xe4 f5; for instance, 32 gxf5 ♕xe4+ 33 ♔xe4 gxf5+ 34 ♔f3 f4 followed by ...♖ae8 and White has problems stabilizing the position.

29...♘f6 30 ♖f1 ♘xe4+

The point behind Bareev's 29th move becomes clear after 30...♕xe4 when White can win a tempo to defend the b1-rook with 31 ♗f3 ♕f4 32 ♗e2; for instance, 32...♕e4 (32...♘e4+ 33 ♔d3 f5 is a worse version of the game, because White's queen's rook has more active possibilities: 34 ♖xf4 exf4 35 ♘d1 ♖ae8 36 g5!) 33 ♕g1 and Black faces the strong threats of ♖xf6 and ♗d3.

31 ♔d3 *(D)*

B

This is just the beginning of an unusual journey of a king that, symbolically, had previously waived the right to castle. If White had won, the game would probably have been included in Chapter 4 (The King as a Fighting Unit). The battle has reached a culmination point; Black has no obvious way to maintain the tension.

31...f5!!

The game now enters irrational territory. White can easily keep things under control after 31...♕g3 32 ♕xe4 f5 33 ♕g2 winning an important tempo in view of a further gxf5, leaving the black king more exposed than its white counterpart; for instance, 33...e4+ 34 ♔d2 ♕e5 35 gxf5 gxf5 36 ♕g5 and White wins.

32 ♖xf4 exf4 33 ♘f1

A natural reaction: White maintains his material advantage. In his notes for *Informator 73*, Bareev gives the alternative 33 ♘xf5 gxf5 34 g5 ♖ae8 35 ♕f3 ♔g7 36 ♕xf4 ♘d6 37 ♗f3 as winning for White. If he had reached this point during his calculations (which he probably didn't) he might have avoided it anyway, because Black keeps an apparently dangerous initiative for a few more moves: 37...♖e4 38 ♕h2 ♖e7 (the rook has to guard the e5-square) 39 ♖b2! (the tempting 39 h5?! f4 40 h6+ ♔g8 followed by ...♗f5+ leaves Black with adequate compensation; the connected pawns lose their mobility, providing the black king with a most welcome shelter while the white king is still under fire) 39...f4 40 ♖e2 ♗f5+ 41 ♔d2 ♘xc4+ 42 ♔c1 ♘e5. Apparently Black has achieved a lot, but he lacks stability in the centre (for instance, he would need a pawn on d6). White keeps the advantage with a calm move like 43 h5 (43 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 44 ♕xf4 gives White some problems with his coordination after 44...♖e7 although his position should be still winning).

I believe that the reader will admit that all this was not so easy to calculate and, especially, evaluate correctly under time-pressure. Besides, move by move, Bareev is given the possibility of choosing between two apparently equivalent winning lines, a very unpleasant psychological situation (see also the game Vajda-Marin, from Chapter 4, The King as a Fighting Unit).

33...fxg4!

Another unexpected move. After 33...♖ae8 White can stabilize the position by playing 34 g5.

34 ♔xe4 *(D)*

Worse is 34 ♕xe4 ♗f5 35 ♗xg4 ♗xe4+ 36 ♔xe4 f3! with a reasonable position for Black; for instance, 37 ♘h2 f2 38 ♖f1 ♖f6.

B

White has now a gargantuan material advantage: a queen for an exchange.

34...f3

It is hard to comment on this move. The move-order 34...♖ae8+ 35 ♔d3 ♗f5+ 36 ♔d2 f3 is more restrictive; then the white queen can't defend the rook. Bareev gives 37 ♕g3 ♗xb1 38 ♕xg4 with a clear advantage for White. Further progress isn't easy; for instance, after 38...f2 the impetuous 39 h5?! gives Black chances to defend after 39...gxh5 40 ♕xh5+ ♗h7 41 ♗c2 ♖e7, because it is not easy to get the knight into play. 39 ♗e2 is better, maintaining the tension.

However, the move-order played in the game has the merit of offering White another choice and inviting him to spend more time and energy.

35 ♕b2

35 ♕g3 would most likely transpose to the previous note.

35...♖ae8+ 36 ♔d3 ♖e1 37 ♘g3

Bareev attaches two question marks to this move. From an objective point of view, he might be right, because White drops within just a few moves from a better, possibly winning, position to a close to losing one.

On the other hand, with little time left, the general recommendation is to be consistent in your actions and this is what Bareev just did: he stuck as much as possible to his material advantage.

Instead, he could have returned part of it with 37 ♕f2 ♗f5+ 38 ♔d2 ♖xf1 39 ♕xf1 ♗xb1 and now, the king would have crowned a unique carrier with 40 ♔e3 preparing to blockade the dangerous pawns and free the queen of this defensive task.

37...f2 38 ♗e2 ♖g1!

Little by little, White loses his stability on the kingside.

39 ♘f1 ♗f5+ 40 ♔d2 g3

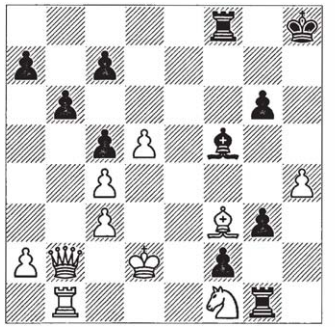
The mutual time-trouble came to an end here. It soon became clear that, despite not having won back any of the sacrificed material, Black is not worse at all; his pawns are too dangerous while White has poor coordination.

41 ♗f3? *(D)*

Bareev awards this move an exclamation mark; before pressing the clock, he also offered a draw, with the most natural voice one could imagine. He probably had in mind the variation actually played in the game, but I am sure he could have hardly considered this to be 'a typical drawish position'. As we shall see, this move should have led White close to disaster.

41 ♘xg3, eliminating one of the pawns, is necessary, though Black is in no danger of losing; for instance, he can more or less force a draw with 41...♗xb1 (or 41...♖xb1 42 ♕a3 ♖g1) 42 ♘f1 ♗e4 43 ♔e3 ♗g2 44 ♕b1 ♗xf1 45 ♗xf1 ♖xf1 46 ♕xf1 ♔g7 but on the other hand it is not easy to find a way to play for more.

B



41...♗xb1?

After being masses of material down for so long, it was not easy for Nisipeanu to resolve to play for a win with all his energy; the simple fact of rejecting a draw must have required a major psychological effort from him.

That night, during the joint analysis of the Romanian players, who deep in their soul felt that we had just missed a drawn match or maybe even a victory against the strongest team in the world, the move 41...♔g7! was recommended. The idea is simple: before starting to grab material, Black improves the position of his king, in order to prevent the perpetual check. White has a wide choice again, but this time between several unpleasant variations:

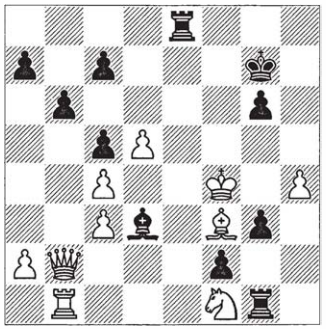
a) 42 ♖d1? (this is just too slow) 42...♗h3 43 ♔e3 ♗xf1 44 ♕b1 ♖xf3+! 45 ♔xf3 ♗g2+ 46 ♔xg3 ♖xd1 47 ♕xd1 f1♕ 48 ♕g4 and now, the most effective and elegant move seems to be 48...♕g1, winning.

b) 42 ♘xg3 (this is worse now than on the preceding move: the black king is better placed, while the white bishop will have to return to e2; White cannot avoid an endgame with two rooks

vs queen with equal pawns) 42...♖xg3 43 ♗e2 ♗xb1 44 ♕xb1 ♖g1 45 ♕e4 (or 45 ♗f1 ♖e8 46 ♕b5 ♖e7!) 45...♖e1! (creating an unpleasant pin and the threat of ...♖xe2+) 46 ♕g2 (46 ♕e5+ only misplaces the queen: 46...♖f6 47 ♕xc7+ ♖f7 48 ♕e5+ ♔h7 followed by ...♖xe2+ with a win for Black) 46...f1♕ 47 ♗xf1 ♖exf1. White has good saving chances here.

c) 42 ♔e3 (we wrongly considered this to be enough for a draw) 42...♖e8+ 43 ♔f4 (the king continues his heroic carrier, but his soldiers are too widely dispersed to follow him on the way to the glory) 43...♗d3! *(D)*.

W



We failed to find this move in Elista; one quiet move (41...♔g7!) when having only an exchange for the queen was enough for one night. Taking advantage of White's helplessness, Black wants to take the c4-pawn, which had been weak from the opening; after that, a complete simplification would lead to a won pawn endgame. White has no satisfactory reply:

c1) 44 ♖c1 ♖f8+ (the exposed position of the king allows Black to improve the position of his rook with tempo) 45 ♔e3 ♖xf1 46 ♗g2 ♖xc1 47 ♕xc1 and now the calm 47...♗xc4 creates the threat of ...♗xd5, while keeping in reserve ...f2-f1♕.

c2) 44 ♕c1 ♗xf1 45 ♕xf1 ♖e1 and Black wins material.

c3) 44 ♕a1 (a horrible square for the queen, but this seems to be the variation where Black must be most inventive) 44...♖f8+ (before taking the pawn, it is necessary to drive the king back, thus preventing ♘xg3) 45 ♔e3 ♗xc4 46 ♘d2 (relatively best; after 46 ♖c1 Black gets the aforementioned pawn ending: 46...♖xf3+ 47 ♔xf3 g2 48 ♔xf2 gxf1♕+) 46...♖e8+ (fortunately, it is only possible to claim a draw by repetition of position, not moves or pairs of moves) 47 ♗e4 (47 ♔f4 also leads to a worse endgame for White: 47...♖ee1! 48 ♖xe1 fxe1♕ 49 ♕xe1 ♖xe1 50 ♘xc4 ♖c1 and Black's queenside pawns will be very dangerous) 47...♖xe4+!! 48 ♘xe4 (48 ♔xe4 takes White's eye off the f2-pawn, and so allows 48...♖xb1 49 ♕xb1 g2 with a winning position) 48...♖xb1 49 ♕xb1 f1♕ 50 ♕xf1 ♗xf1 51 ♘xg3 and now 51...♗c4 wins a second pawn for Black.

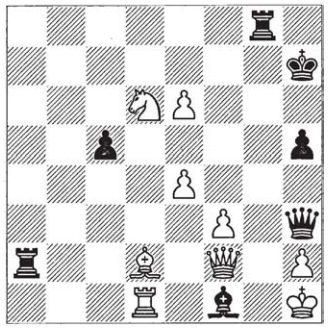
42 ♕xb1 ♖xf3 43 ♕xg6 g2

Understanding that his king cannot escape the perpetual, Nisipeanu offered back a draw.

½-½

When embarking upon the whole tactical operation, involving such major material sacrifices, Nisipeanu might have remembered the game presented below, where he faced a similar situation, but from the opposite point of view: in spite of being, at a certain moment, a queen *and* an exchange up, he slipped from a winning position into a losing one.

W



Komliakov – Nisipeanu
Bucharest 1995

White has a totally lost position, and less than a minute (there was no increment in those days) left on the clock to reach the time-control. Such extreme situations often have a paralysing effect over the player with the advantage.

With his next moves, Komliakov prepares incredible counterplay, which his young opponent fails to foresee.

49 ♘f5!? ♖g2

This is winning, of course, but for practical reasons the simplest way is 49...♗g2+ 50 ♔g1 ♗xf3+ 51 ♘g3 ♖xg3+ 52 ♕xg3 ♕xg3+ 53 hxg3 ♗xd1, simplifying the position while retaining a huge material advantage.

50 ♗f4!?! ♖axf2?

After this natural move, taking a whole queen for nothing, the game should end in a draw. When playing his previous move (49...♖g2), Nisipeanu probably thought that his opponent would resign immediately. This might have drastically reduced his level of concentration, causing him to fail to notice that the unexpected 50 ♗f4 not only defends the h2-square, but also opens the d-file for counterplay.

With greater concentration, he would have probably found the forced win after 50...♖xh2+! 51 ♗xh2 ♖xf2, when White's counterplay is insufficient: 52 ♖d7+ ♔g6 53 ♖g7+ ♔f6 54 ♖f7+ ♔xe6 55 ♖e7+ ♔f6 and the dangerous bishop is pinned. However, this is more complicated to calculate than the variation mentioned in the note to Black's 49th move.

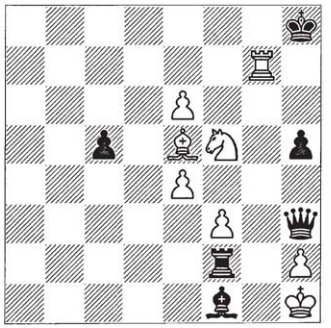
50...♗d3 or 50...♗b5, both preventing ♖d7+ and taking advantage of the weakness of the first rank, would have been equally good, but, again, they required some concrete thinking.

51 ♖d7+ ♖g7

51...♔g8 leads to an immediate perpetual, but Black was still playing for a win. The attempt to evacuate the king by 51...♔g6?? fails painfully: 52 ♖g7+ ♔f6 53 ♖f7+ ♔xe6 (or 53...♔g6 54 ♘e7#) 54 ♖e7+ ♔f6 55 ♗e5+ ♔g5 56 ♖g7#.

52 ♖xg7+ ♔h8 53 ♗e5! *(D)*

B



53...♖xh2+?

While making this losing move, Black offered a draw which his opponent, although with just a few seconds left, bravely rejected! The only saving line was 53...♕xf3+ 54 ♔g1 ♕xe4 55 ♖g5+!!, when Black should accept the draw by perpetual rather than continue 55...♕xe5?! 56 ♖xh5+ ♔g8 57 ♘e7+, when only White can be better.

54 ♔g1!

White is not willing, of course, to dismantle his deadly mechanism, built up from nothing, for the sake of capturing a mere rook.

54...♖h1+ 55 ♔f2 ♖h2+ 56 ♖g2+ 1-0

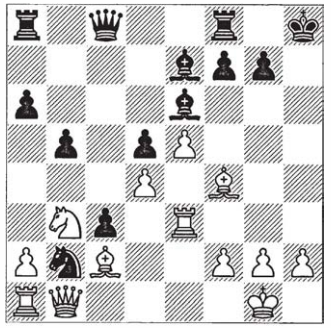
Black resigned because of the serious material losses.

It is well known that many chess-players are superstitious. For those who aren't (yet!), I shall mention that this incredible game was played on Friday 13th.

However, the more important conclusion is that a game is not really over until the clocks have been stopped.

Exercise 10.1

W



Dolmatov – Yusupov
Wijk aan Zee Ct (7) 1991

In this rather unusual position White seems to have good attacking chances. The black king's position is weak, while the b2-knight is too far away to provide any assistance. If White could give a check on h3, the game would end right away. Therefore, Dolmatov played **22 ♘c5?** threatening both ♖xc3 and ♘xe6 followed by ♖h3+. How should Black continue?

11 Exchange Sacrifices

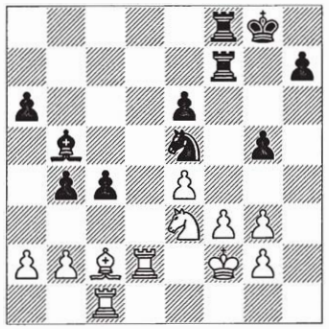
Pure rook sacrifices for defensive purposes occur rather rarely in practice; I have included only one such example at the end of this section. There is, however, a matter of terminology involved here. For instance, trading the queen for a rook and knight is called a 'queen sacrifice' anyway, but giving up the rook for a minor piece is classified in a separate category, called an 'exchange sacrifice'. The explanation for such a preferential treatment might be the relatively high frequency of this kind of tactical operation. Here are some possible reasons for this surprising popularity.

Sacrificing the exchange comes in more handy than other forms of giving up material. First of all, it usually consists of a simple operation (something like ♖x♗ or ♖x♘). There are plenty of opportunities for it because it is not customary to hide minor pieces from the enemy rooks. Secondly, if the sacrificing side manages to get a pawn as a compensation, the material deficit becomes minimal (around half a pawn). If you know that you are forced to give up some money for a certain purpose, you first try with the least valuable coin you find in your pocket; in chess, the exchange sacrifice for one pawn is precisely that smallest coin.

I remember how, towards the end of 1989 I opened the book *Strategia nadezhnosti* (The Strategy of Safety) containing a collection of Petrosian's best games. Up to that point, I didn't have a very high opinion about the 9th World Champion's style of play, but soon I had to change my attitude completely. I was deeply impressed by Petrosian's ease in solving the most complicated problems by means of an exchange sacrifice as well as by the frequency of these special moments throughout his career. My own playing style came under such a powerful influence that soon I managed to sacrifice the exchange in no fewer than six games in a row!

Here is one of them, played in a decisive round of the zonal tournament.

W



Marin – Knaak
Stara Zagora Z 1990

By this moment, both players had around 15 minutes left to reach the time-control. White seems to have serious problems. The f3-pawn (or, if you wish, square) is under strong pressure and has insufficient defence. Things would change dramatically if the white bishop were on e2, where it would not only defend f3 but also attack c4, but this is 'obviously impossible'.

27 ♗d1!!

Other moves look bad for White: 27 ♔g1? ♖xf3! winning a vital pawn, or 27 ♔e1? ♘xf3+ 28 gxf3 ♖xf3 with a strong attack; for instance, 29 ♘d1 ♖f1+ 30 ♔e2 c3+.

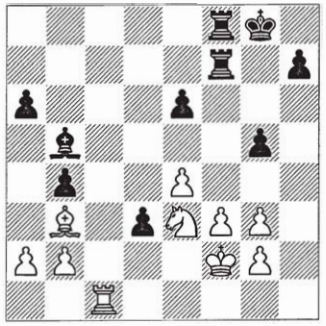
Many years after the game was played, when huge databases were at everyone's disposal, I was very surprised (and, in a certain way, flattered) to find an input mistake to this game. All the available sources indicated 27 ♖dd1 as the real move-order with the sequence 27...♘d3+ (with an ? attached) 28 ♖xd3 (!?; of course, some annotator even recommended 28 ♗xd3 as leading to a clear advantage for White) 28...cxd3 29 ♗b3. Perhaps 27 ♗d1 was such an unexpected and improbable move, even after it was played, that the computer operator 'decided' there was a mistake on the score sheets...

27...♘d3+

Black is practically forced to accept the offer.

28 ♖xd3 cxd3 29 ♗b3 *(D)*

B



The situation has changed. All the black pieces remain badly placed, while the white ones are suddenly revived. Maybe Knaak could have still held a draw, but from a psychological point of view he was in a very unpleasant situation. During the post-mortem, his brief description about what happened in the game was something like "I won the exchange and got a losing position".

29...♖e8 30 ♖c5 h6?!

The position would have become sharper if Black hadn't allowed the king to blockade the d-pawn; for instance, 30...d2 31 ♖xg5+ ♔f8 32 ♖e5 ♖d7 33 f4.

31 ♔e1 ♔g7

This was the last chance to prevent the king from occupying the nice blocking square d2: 31...d2+!.

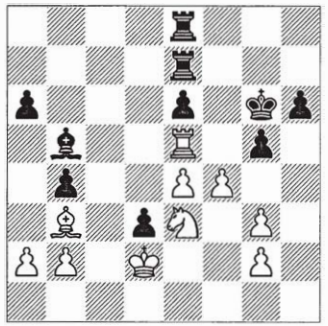
32 ♔d2 ♔g6 33 ♖e5 ♖fe7 34 f4 *(D)*

The black king is captive in a sort of cage formed by his own pieces. Defence is not easy, of course, but although White plays without risk, it is equally difficult to make concrete progress.

34...♗d7?!

Knaak wanted to defend the e6-pawn, but he completely abandons the queenside. 34...♔g7! is the best defence here. Other moves are worse; for instance, 34...gxf4 35 gxf4 ♔g7 36 g4 and White is able to create dangerous threats like g5, ♘g4. Or 34...♔f6 35 ♘g4+ ♔g7 36 fxg5 hxg5 37 ♖xg5+ ♔f8 (37...♔h8 38 ♘f6 ♖f8

B



39 e5 also looks good for White) 38 ♘f6 winning.

35 ♗c4

White is clearly better now.

35...a5 36 ♖xa5 gxf4 37 gxf4 e5 38 ♖a6+ ♔h5 39 f5 ♖g7 40 f6 ♖h7 41 f7 ♖f8 42 ♖a5 ♖hxf7 43 ♖xe5+ ♔h4 44 ♗xf7 ♖xf7 45 ♘f5+

White won 15 moves later.

Although I was rather pleased with this game, I must admit that the whole idea of achieving the best regrouping at the cost of an exchange was not really original. Here is where my inspiration came from:

B

Petrosian – Gligorić
Varna OL 1962

Let's follow Petrosian's comments: "An experienced player would notice right away that White's position is rather difficult. Black has very active pieces, mobile pawns in the centre and if he managed to play ...e4 after transferring

the rooks to f6 and f8, White situation would not be enviable. Usually, when the opponent has hanging pawns, we try to force one of them to advance, in order to blockade them. It might seem that there would be no problems with blockading on e4, but the reality is a bit more complicated. The black pieces cooperate perfectly. The c5-knight and the f5-bishop make such a plan impossible."

25...♖a6 26 ♗f3 ♖af6

26...e4 would allow 27 ♕d4! with counterplay. It might seem that White is completely helpless, in view of the threat ...e4 (maybe after ...b6). Doubling rooks (starting with ♖f2 or ♖e2) looks impossible, because this would lead to the loss of an exchange after either ...♗d3 or ...♘d3. Unless...

27 ♖e1!!

...unless you don't take it as a loss, but as a sacrifice!

27...♘d3 28 ♖fe2 ♘xe1 29 ♕xe1 ♖e8 30 c5

Black's extra exchange doesn't make itself felt, since White blockades the position perfectly. No wonder that the game soon ends in a draw.

30...♖ff8 31 ♘e4 ½-½

Sometimes, the exchange sacrifice comes as the perfect solution to several different problems, of both a strategic and a tactical nature.

W

Marin – Kantsler
Manila OL 1992

Black has concentrated a lot of force on the kingside, seeking an attack. The threats of ...♘g3 and ...♗g3 are hanging in the air. In the meantime, Black's d-pan severely restricts the activity of White's minor pieces.

White's chances are less obvious. If he managed to parry the attack, some of Black's pieces would be left misplaced. Moreover, the elimination of the d5-pawn would instantly revive all the white minor pieces; the weaknesses left behind by the black f-pawn would also make themselves felt. This seems to be easier said than done, but I managed to discover a small coin in my pocket.

20 ♖e5

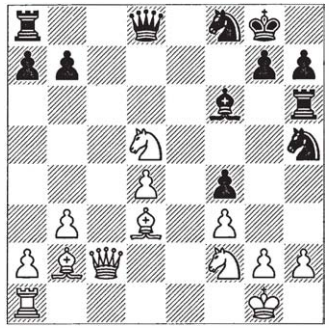
The rook occupies a central square, freeing the f2-knight from the unpleasant pin, creating ideas of an eventual jump to g4. However, Black's next move had to be considered in advance.

20...♗f6 21 ♖xd5!

My opponent might have expected 21 ♘g4 when he would have obtained a powerful attack with 21...♗xg4 22 fxg4 ♗xe5 23 dxe5 ♘g3!; for instance, 24 ♘xd5 (24 hxg3? loses to 24...♕b6+) 24...♕h4 25 h3 ♘e6 planning ...f3.

21...♗xd5 22 ♘xd5 *(D)*

B



Suddenly, White's ideas mentioned in the introduction to the game come to life. Black is left without any attacking chances, and will have problems regrouping his pieces.

22...♔h8 23 ♘xf6 ♘xf6 24 ♗c4 ♘g6 25 ♕f5

Little by little, White invades via the light squares, weakened after the disappearance of the black bishop.

25...♖h5

25...♕c8 allows 26 ♗e6 followed by d5, with awesome pressure along the diagonals.

26 ♕e6 ♕a5 27 ♖e1!? b5

More prudent is 27...♘f8 28 ♕e2 ♖e8 although after 29 ♘e4 White is well established in the centre.

27...♕xa2 is risky because of 28 ♘d3 threatening ♖a1 and thus winning a tempo to proceed with ♘e5 or d5.

28 ♗f1 ♕xa2

Black's position was not ripe for such activity. Again, 28...♘f8 is better. It seems that the slight material advantage induced in my opponent some sort of psychological obligation to play actively.

29 ♘d3 ♕a5 30 ♕c6

Underlining Black's lack of coordination.

30...♖f8 31 ♖a1 ♕b6

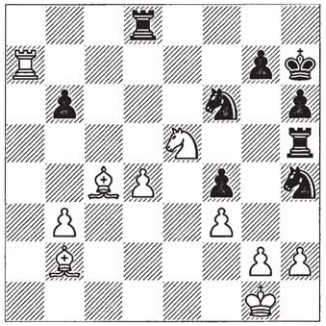
Practically forced; otherwise, White would manage to double his major pieces on the seventh rank.

32 ♕xb6 axb6 33 ♘e5 ♘h4 34 ♖a7

Without queens on the board, Black's attack has little chances to succeed, while White's pressure becomes stronger and stronger.

34...♖c8 35 ♗xb5 h6 36 ♗d3 ♔g8 37 ♗a6 ♖d8 38 ♗c4+ ♔h7 *(D)*

W



39 ♗d3+

White has reached a maximum of activity and this is the best moment to start hunting the disorganized black army with 39 g3!; for instance, 39...fxg3 40 hxg3 ♖xe5 (40...♖g5 is answered by 41 ♔f2 winning back the exchange, while 40...♘g6 loses to 41 ♘xg6 ♔xg6 42 ♗d3+) 41 dxe5 ♘xf3+ 42 ♔g2 ♘d2 43 exf6 ♘xc4 44 ♖xg7+ ♔h8 45 ♗c3! and White is winning.

39...♔g8 40 ♗c4+ ♔h7 41 ♗d3+??

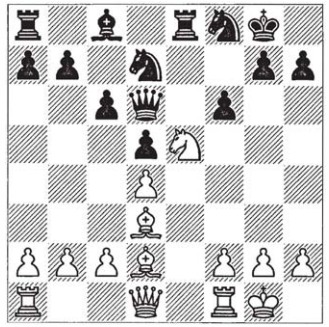
Repeating the move once in order to reach the control was correct, but now I should have switched to the winning plan. I don't remember my exact state of mind at that point; I only recall that some argument had erupted on the fourth board of the match, regarding a malfunctioning clock.

However, the real reason for the missed occasion must have been of a different nature. Deep inside, I might have been influenced by having been 'an exchange down' for such a long time. When the opportunity of repeating moves arose, I couldn't seriously consider anything else.

41...♔g8 ½-½

When the match finished, my team-mates congratulated me for the unexpected sacrifice, but I had previously seen the whole idea of repelling the attack while also improving the configuration in the centre in the game presented below.

W



Larsen – Petrosian
Havana OL 1966

14 ♕h5

In spite of the symmetrical position that resulted from the opening, Petrosian has serious problems. White's initiative has already acquired concrete form. Apparently, Black has to choose between two evils:

a) 14...g6 15 ♗xg6 hxg6 16 ♘xg6 ♖e7 (also bad are 16...♘xg6? 17 ♕xg6+ ♔f8 18 ♗h6+ ♔e7 19 ♖ae1+, and 16...♘b6? 17 f4 with the terrible threat 18 ♖f3!) 17 ♕h8+ ♔f7 18 ♗f4 ♕e6 19 ♘xe7 ♕xe7 20 ♖ae1 ♘e6 21 ♕h5+

♔g8 22 ♕g6+ with a devastating attack for White.

b) 14...♖e7 doesn't look too tempting either: 15 ♘f3 ♘b6 16 a3 a5 17 ♖ae1 ♗e6 18 ♘h4 g6 19 ♕h6 with a growing initiative.

14...♖xe5! 15 dxe5 fxe5

"The position has changed radically. By sacrificing the exchange, Black has deprived his opponent of the possibility of an immediate attack. The Danish grandmaster should have felt this right away and started the fight against the e5-pawn. This can been achieved by playing 16 f3, after which Black's centre would be in danger." (Petrosian).

16 ♖fe1?!

A typical psychological moment: in the euphoria of having 'won' material, Larsen misses the best move, indicated in the previous comment.

16...e4 17 ♗f1 ♘f6 18 ♕h4 ♗f5 19 ♕g3 ♕e7 20 c3 ♘e6 *(D)*

W

Black's position is perfectly playable now. During the next phase of the game, Larsen failed to find a concrete plan, but continued to play 'for a win' under the hypnosis of the material advantage.

21 ♗e3

This bishop is useful for the fight against the central pawns, so 21 h3 or 21 ♕e5 is preferable.

21...♘g4 22 h3 ♘xe3 23 ♖xe3 ♖f8 24 ♕e5 ♗g6 25 ♖d1 ♕f7 26 ♖d2 ♘f4

Little by little, White starts to face problems. The knight is aiming for d3.

27 b4 h6 28 a4 ♗h7 29 ♕d4 b6 30 ♖e1 ♕c7 31 ♕e3 c5 32 bxc5 bxc5 33 g3?

An unnecessary weakening in time-trouble.

33...♘d3 34 ♗xd3 exd3 35 ♕e6+?

This might have been the right moment to play for a draw with 35 ♖xd3.

35...♕f7 36 ♕xf7+

After 36 ♕d6 ♗e4 the white king is in danger.

36...♔xf7 37 ♖b2

On O'Kelly's suggestion 37 ♖e5, Petrosian gives 37...♖b8 38 f3 ♖b3 39 ♖xd5 ♖xc3 and the connected pawns are very strong.

37...c4

The black pawns are too far advanced now to be stopped. The threat of ...d4 hangs in the air.

38 f3 d4 39 ♖c1 ♔e6 40 ♔f2 ♗e4 41 f4 ♖e8 42 g4

42 cxd4 doesn't change the course of the game: 42...♔d5 43 ♔e3 ♗g6+ 44 ♔d2 ♔xd4. Or 42 ♔e1 dxc3 43 ♖xc3 ♔d5 44 ♔d2 ♗f3.

42...♗c6 43 ♖e1+ ♔d5 44 ♖xe8 ♗xe8 45 cxd4 c3 46 ♖b8 d2 47 ♖d8+ ♔c4 48 ♖c8+ ♔d3 0-1

The white pawn is a perfect shield for the black king, so Larsen resigned.

Exchange sacrifices are an ideal solution for eliminating the opponent's minor pieces situated on strong outposts. We shall see this happen three(!) times in the next game.

W

Lupulescu – Badea
Romanian Ch (Tusnad) 2001

Black has a solid but very passive position. White decided to start the invasion of the weak dark squares in the enemy territory.

15 g4

This move drives the knight away from the control of the d6-square, but weakens the kingside. It is not easy though to foresee yet how Black could exploit these weaknesses.

15...♘h4 16 ♘c4

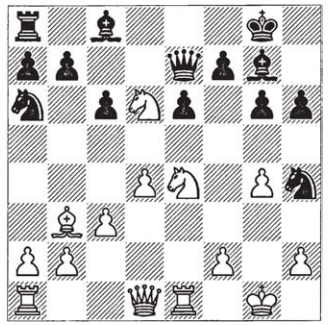
Black's position becomes critical.

16...♖d8 17 ♗d6 ♖xd6!?

The best practical chance. After a queen move, White could drop the bishop back to a3 with the terrible threat of ♘ed6 eventually followed by ♘e5. By eliminating the enemy bishop, Black manages to solve the short-term problems and accentuate the weakness of the f4-square. He also puts his talented but inexperienced opponent in a tricky psychological situation: the considerable material advantage might have induced the idea that he was easily winning, when in fact Black's position is hard to crack.

18 ♘cxd6 *(D)*

B



18...♘c7?!

Black should have placed the f4-square under control with an immediate 18...g5.

19 ♔h1?!

Kindly returning the favour. After 19 f4 Black doesn't have the slightest compensation; for instance, 19...♘d5 20 ♗xd5 cxd5 21 ♘xc8 ♖xc8 22 ♘f2 followed by ♘d3-e5.

19...♘d5 20 c4

This is a less favourable situation for 20 ♗xd5 cxd5 21 ♘xc8 ♖xc8. After 22 ♘d2 (on 22 ♘c5 the second exchange sacrifice becomes possible, similarly to the game: 22...♖xc5 23 dxc5 ♕xc5 24 ♕e2 g5 with nice control of the dark squares) Black is in time with 22...g5 intending ...♘g6-f4.

20...♘f4 21 c5 ♖b8 22 ♕d2 g5 *(D)*

W

White has maintained his space advantage and consolidated his outpost on d6. However, Black has also managed to improve his position. The next step is to solve the problem of the light-squared bishop.

23 ♖e3 b6 24 ♖d1 ♗a6 25 ♗c4?

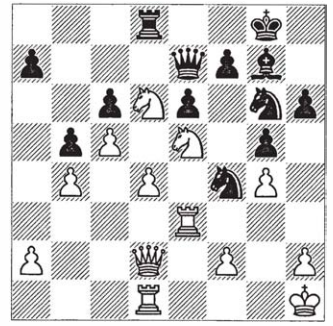
A typical mistake. White felt uncomfortable about the pressure along the a6-f1 diagonal, but the exchange of the bishops only helps Black get a blockade on the light squares.

25...♗xc4 26 ♘xc4 ♘hg6 27 ♘ed6?!

White's desire to install the other knight on e5 is understandable, but he overlooked, or at least underestimated, Black's intentions. Better is 27 ♘cd6 maintaining the pressure.

27...♖d8 28 b4 b5 29 ♘e5 *(D)*

B



29...♖xd6!

The second exchange sacrifice in this game takes place on precisely the same square as the preceding one. If in the first case we could talk only about getting some practical chances in a position that was bad anyway, here we can see a

completely sound sacrifice, helping Black to solve most of (if not all) his problems.

30 cxd6 ♕xd6 31 ♘xg6 ♘xg6

Black has the better structure now and controls several important squares in the centre. White cannot easily take advantage of his outposts on e5, e4 and c5, because he has no minor pieces left. His active possibilities are also reduced by the weakness of the d-pawn and the unsafe position of his king.

32 f3 ♘f4 33 ♖e4 ♘d5

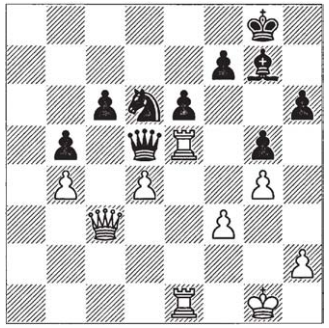
Shattering White's dreams about an eventual return of material with ♖xf4.

34 a3 ♘b6

The knight hurries to c4, in order to avoid problems with the backward c6-pawn.

35 ♕c3 ♘c4 36 a4 a6 37 axb5 axb5 38 ♖de1 ♕d5 39 ♔g1 ♘d6 40 ♖e5 *(D)*

B



White probably relied on this counter-sacrifice (the third in this game already!) which forces the enemy queen to leave its perfect outpost. However, his material advantage will be reduced to a minimum now, while the strategic problems will persist.

40...♗xe5 41 ♖xe5 ♕a2 42 ♖c5

Decentralizing the queen with 42 ♕xc6 would most probably lead to a perpetual check: 42...♕a1+ 43 ♔g2 ♕xd4 44 ♕c5 ♕d2+ and because of the weakness of the b4-pawn, White cannot cover his king with the queen.

42...♘c4 43 ♖xc6 ♕e2

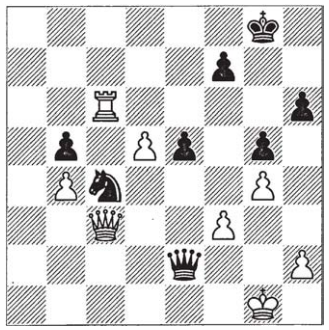
Suddenly, White faces the unpleasant threats ...♘e3 and ...♘d2.

44 d5!

44 ♖xc4 is premature since after 44...bxc4 45 b5 ♕d1+ 46 ♔f2 ♕b3! the black passed pawn is more dangerous than its white counterpart.

44...e5 *(D)*

W



Necessary in order to interfere with the dark diagonal.

45 ♖xc4!

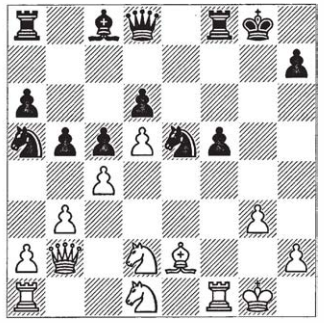
The fourth exchange sacrifice in this game and, at the same time, the third one with the purpose of eliminating a minor piece from a strong outpost. I imagine that a study composer could create a position where, after successive underpromotions of the pawns, a greater number of exchange sacrifices becomes possible, but for practical reasons, we can consider this game to hold the record of such tactical operations. You cannot really blame White for not having tried to play on in a position like 45 ♖xh6 ♔g7 46 ♖h3 ♘d2 where he obviously 'doesn't risk winning'.

45...bxc4 46 d6 ½-½

There is still some life left in the position, but the most probable result is a draw; for instance: 46...e4! 47 d7 ♕d1+ 48 ♔f2 ♕xd7 49 fxe4 (49 ♕xc4 ♕d2+ 50 ♕e2 is another line leading to an equal position) 49...♕xg4 50 ♕xc4 ♕f4+ and the king cannot escape the perpetual attacks from the black queen because after 51 ♔e1 ♕xh2 52 b5 ♕g1+ 53 ♔e2 g4 the black pawn is at least as dangerous as the white one.

It often happens that one of the sides has a considerable positional advantage, but cannot take advantage of it because of the opponent's initiative. In such cases, exchange sacrifices come in very handy: they can annihilate the dynamic factors of the position in order to harvest the fruit of the strategic domination.

B



Petrosian – Spassky
Moscow Wch (10) 1966

19...f4!? 20 gxf4 ♗h3?

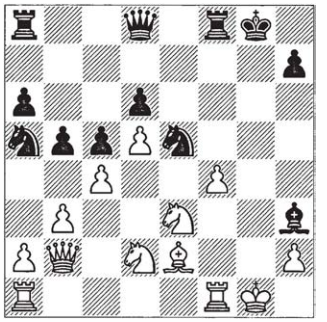
Black has the initiative, but he should carefully consider which pieces to exchange, because of the potential risk of being left with a passive knight on a5. For instance, the black bishop is a useful piece, able to create threats both against the enemy king and the apparently well defended white pawn on d5, and also defending the light squares in Black's camp. Spassky was probably aware of this, but he might have considered only equivalent exchanges; unfortunately for him, exchange sacrifices are, after all, also a particular case of piece trading...

It is remarkable that during this first match against Petrosian, the young aspirant to the supreme title (a player with little respect for material himself) repeatedly gave his experienced opponent the possibility of using his favourite weapon, the positional exchange sacrifice. Although Spassky has never been one to work excessively hard on chess between or before competitions, he must have been aware of this facet of Petrosian's style. The fact that he nevertheless fell victim more than once to exchange sacrifices during this match speaks a lot about the surprising character of this kind of tactical operation.

20...♖xf4, as recommended by Petrosian, is better; for instance, 21 ♘e3 ♕g5+ 22 ♔h1 ♖xf1+ 23 ♘exf1 (this looks like the most consistent move, intending a further improvement of the position with ♘g3, ♘de4, etc.; Petrosian only gives 23 ♘dxf1 ♖a7 when White has to fight for a draw) 23...bxc4! 24 bxc4 (the attempted *zwischenzug* 24 ♕c3 allows 24...cxb3! 25 ♕xa5 ♗b7 with decisive threats) 24...♗h3 25 ♘g3 ♘exc4! (radically solving the problem of the marginalized knight) 26 ♗xc4 ♘xc4 27 ♕b7 (the only way to stay in the game) 27...♖f8 28 ♘xc4 h5 and Black has a strong initiative against White's superior but disorganized army. The d6-pawn is taboo because of ...♕f6, while 29 ♖g1 is strongly met by 29...♗g4!.

21 ♘e3! *(D)*

B



Not at all impressed by Black's threat, Petrosian uses this vital tempo to get his pieces coordinated.

21...♗xf1

21...♖xf4 is much less effective now: 22 ♖xf4 ♕g5+ 23 ♖g4! (causing mass simplifications in order to repel the attack and leave the a5-knight badly misplaced) 23...♘xg4 24 ♘xg4 ♗xg4 25 ♗xg4 ♕xg4+ 26 ♔h1 ♕d4 (obviously forced) 27 ♖g1+ ♔h8 28 ♕xd4+ cxd4 29 ♖g4 (Petrosian) and Black has to fight for a draw. Although this ending might have offered better chances for survival than the game continuation, it was obviously not easy for Spassky to admit his mistake so quickly.

22 ♖xf1

The initiative has passed to White. The bishop will go to e6, paralysing Black's rooks, while the c4-square is too well defended to let the queen's knight dream of active possibilities.

22...♘g6?!

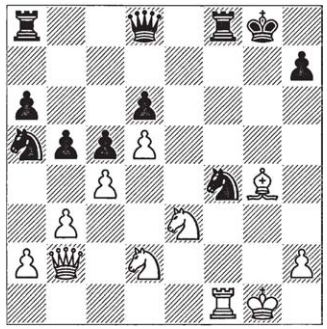
Black is still hoping to create some threats on the kingside. Boleslavsky, Petrosian's second

for this match, recommended 22...♘d7 23 ♗g4 ♕f6, when Black's position is defensible.

23 ♗g4 ♘xf4? *(D)*

This second careless move is even more difficult to understand: Spassky had been warned about the danger just two moves ago. Of course, 23...♖xf4? is bad due to 24 ♗e6+ with a decisive attack, but 23...♕f6! is simply necessary, even though after 24 ♗e6+ ♔h8 25 ♕xf6+ ♖xf6 26 f5 ♘e5 27 ♘e4! (Petrosian) White's advantage is obvious.

W



24 ♖xf4!

Of course!

24...♖xf4 25 ♗e6+ ♖f7 26 ♘e4

White's domination, in spite of the deficit of two exchanges, is impressive.

26...♕h4 27 ♘xd6 ♕g5+

27...♕e1+ 28 ♔g2 ♕xe3 loses the queen to 29 ♗xf7+ ♔f8 30 ♕h8+ ♔e7 31 ♘f5+ ♔xf7 32 ♕g7+ (Petrosian).

28 ♔h1 ♖aa7

This allows an elegant finish, but 28...♕xe3 loses in a similar way to the previous variation.

29 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 30 ♕h8+! 1-0

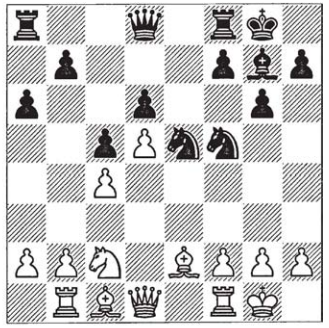
Black resigned in view of the massive material losses. If he had played just a few more moves, his only piece left on the board would have been precisely the a5-knight...

Petrosian never treated the exchange sacrifice as a secret weapon. He liked to speak about it, give lectures, write articles, explaining in detail the process of thinking in such situations. This looks like a completely unwise attitude: why did he so openly warn his potential opponents about the hidden danger?

Petrosian might have understood that it is not so easy to prepare or take preventive measures against such a method of fighting, even if you know there is an increased degree of probability. His first match against Spassky and especially the game presented above where he was allowed to sacrifice two exchanges in a row are good examples. People simply cannot think permanently about defending their minor pieces against the enemy rooks.

Near the end of his life, Petrosian was given the following opportunity to perform his favourite sacrifice:

W



Polugaevsky – Petrosian
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1983

After an original opening, Black has obtained a very comfortable game. Just by inertia, White keeps playing for an advantage, overlooking the 19th, typical Tigranian move.

14 b4 cxb4 15 ♖xb4 ♕c7 16 ♗b2 ♖fe8 17 ♘d4 ♘xd4 18 ♗xd4

White has some space advantage and the bishop-pair. Polu probably hoped to get some pressure against the b7- and d6-pawns. With his next move, Petrosian offers the exchange of the dark-squared bishops, which would secure the c5-square for the knight.

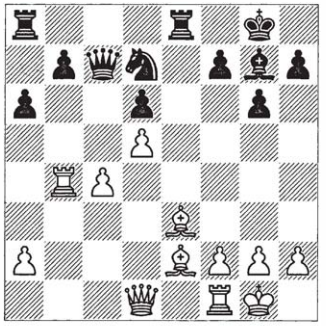
18...♘d7 19 ♗e3 *(D)*

White tries to preserve the bishop. Didn't he notice that behind the e8-rook was sitting Petrosian?

19...♖xe3!

This way, Black will get complete control of the dark squares, which makes White's position rather difficult.

B



20 fxe3 ♘c5 21 ♕c2 ♖e8 22 ♖f3 ♗h6 23 ♕c3 ♕e7

It becomes clear that after taking the e3-pawn, Black will start pushing his kingside majority, with good winning chances. Alarmed by this prospect, Polu decides to counterattack...

24 ♖b6?? ♘a4 0-1

...but not for so long: massive material losses are unavoidable now.

Finally, let's have a look at a famous pure rook sacrifice.

B

Geller – Euwe
Zurich Ct 1953

At the cost of one pawn, White has managed to get a dangerous attack, at least from an optical point of view. With his last move (22 ♗h6) he prepared an assault with practically all his pieces (♖f1, ♘f5, ♖g4) which seems to be impossible to resist. Geller must have thought that the communication between the wings would help him avoid complications connected with the g2-square, since the attacking white queen safely defends the c2-square.

22...♖h8!!

An eye-witness mentioned that Geller's face lost its entire colour when Euwe made this move. The idea is simple and yet brilliant: Black is ready to pay with a whole rook for the control of the c2-square.

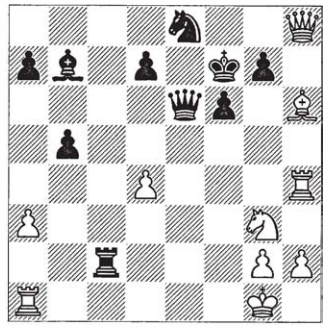
Annotating the game for ChessBase, Kasparov awards this move a question mark and two exclamation marks. This seems to be one of his favourite evaluations in unclear positions; see also the game Kasparov-Petrosian from Chapter 4 (The King as a Fighting Unit). However, just as in that case, Garry's variation is mistaken, which made me ignore the question mark.

He gives 22...♕d5 23 ♖e4 ♕c4 as a better try for an advantage with Black, but White seems to be winning quickly after 24 ♖g4; for instance, 24...♖g8 25 ♖e1 and the threat of 26 ♕g6+ ♔f8 27 ♖xe8+!, mating, is impossible to parry in a satisfactory way.

As a possible alternative, Bronstein's suggestion from his book *Mezhdunarodny Turnir Grossmeisterov* 22...♖c4, planning ...♕d5 followed by ...♖xd4, makes more sense, but you cannot really blame Euwe for choosing the spectacular (and correct!) move played in the game.

23 ♕xh8 ♖c2 *(D)*

W



White suddenly faces the decisive threat of 24...♖xg2+ 25 ♔f1 ♕c4+, mating. Geller must have been completely demoralized: just two moves earlier he was attacking with all his

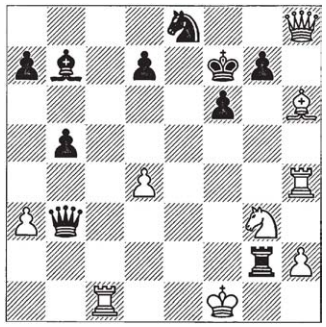
powers and now he suddenly found himself in an opposite role.

24 ♖c1?

Bronstein mentions that this position was analysed thoroughly for several weeks. The conclusion was that White could have kept on fighting only with the move 24 d5!!, trying to discoordinate Black's forces. Bronstein's main line goes 24...♗xd5 (Black fails to create sufficient pressure with 24...♕b6+ 25 ♔h1 ♕f2 26 ♖g1 ♗xd5 because of 27 ♖e4!) 25 ♖d1! (White has to keep an eye on the awesome bishop, but 25 ♖d4 is much worse, owing to 25...♖xg2+ 26 ♔f1 ♖xh2 with the threat ...♕h3+) 25...♖xg2+ 26 ♔f1. White is out of immediate danger, but after 26...gxh6 Black is left with two pawns for the exchange and a relatively safer king position (the previously passive knight would suddenly become a perfect cover for the king after a later ...♘g7). Bronstein also mentions that 27 ♕xh6 is then best (instead, 27 ♖xd5 ♕xd5 28 ♖e4 ♘g7! 29 ♔xg2 f5 30 ♕xh6 fxe4 gives Black the better ending, while 27 ♖xh6? allows 27...♖xg3! 28 hxg3 ♗c4+ with a winning attack).

24...♖xg2+ 25 ♔f1 ♕b3! *(D)*

W



Geller had deprived the queen of the c4-square, but failed to notice that b3 also serves for the transfer to the attacking zone.

26 ♔e1 ♕f3 0-1

Exercises

The following positions are quite famous. The exercises are therefore intended as a kind of examination on general chess culture.

11.1

B

Reshevsky – Petrosian
Zurich Ct 1953

Petrosian: "This position is probably the best known from my entire career and became an example included in every handbook, and even emblematic for the positional sacrifice of the exchange. On the board we have a complex strategic struggle, with equal material. It seems that we have a dynamic equilibrium: the offensive and defensive possibilities of both sides compensate for each other.

"White has a strong pawn-centre, which, if set in motion, would simply crush Black's position. On the other hand, it is not too clear how White could push his pawns. The consequences of playing e6 are rather unclear, while the d5 advance is not possible yet. Therefore, aiming for this position, I was rather content. But when I analysed the situation more deeply, I realized that Black has a difficult position. Why?

"First of all, because all the black pieces occupy passive, defensive positions. White could prepare the advance of his d-pawn to d6, disorganizing Black's pieces and getting a winning position. On the other hand, he could start pushing the h-pawn to h6. If Black tried to stop this with ...h6 or ...h5, an additional weakness would be created. I soon understood that, if I managed to transfer my knight to d5, the situation would improve dramatically: from dangerous, it would become quite promising. The white centre would be blockaded, the b2-bishop would become a bad piece and Black would get the possibility to create (with ...b4) a passed pawn which, sustained by the d5-knight and g6-bishop, would represent an incredible force.

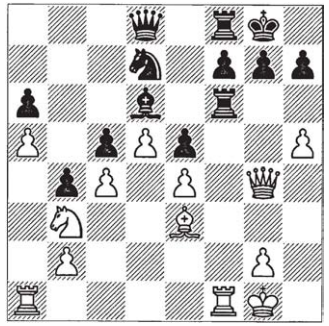
"But equally clear are the difficulties Black is facing in bringing the knight to d5. It could get there from c7, b6 or e7. In order to transfer the knight to c7 or b6, Black would have to lose a lot of time and White, by playing ♗f3 and d5, would get a winning position. Of course, it would be highly desirable if the transfer square were e7, but how? In order to achieve this, Black should move the rook, but where?

"Let's try the following variation: 25...♖b7 and now 26 ♗f3 (threatening d5) or 26 e6 ♘e7 27 ♗f3 ♘d5 28 ♗xd5! ♖xd5 29 ♕f3. The rook is under attack and cannot move because it would leave the other rook *en prise*. After 29...fxe6 would follow 30 ♕xd5 with a winning position. In the diagrammed position, I had a rather long think. When, finally, the right idea came to me, I was invaded by joy: the move is so simple that you shouldn't doubt it. You need only cross the psychological barrier to put the rook under the bishop's attack."

Do you also see the idea?

11.2

B



Tal – Petrosian
USSR Ch (Riga) 1958

Let us follow Tal's memories: "Petrosian played the opening rather passively, allowing me to obtain a considerable advantage, which I considered to be decisive. White has prepared an attack on the kingside and on the other wing, instead of counterplay, Black has just a weak pawn (c5). This pleasant state of spirit persisted up until the moment when Tigran Vartanovich played..."

Can you find the move which changed the course of the game?

12 Minor-Piece Sacrifices

A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!
SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*

It often happens that our main troubles are caused by the opponent's superiorpawn-structure. For various reasons our own pawns are sometimes unable to match the opponent's, and it may be that because of the closed character of the position, exchange sacrifices are not available. We may nevertheless need to make some drastic changes in the structure in a particular area of the board, such as annihilating the enemy pawns so as to free our own pawns.

Just as in life, everything is possible in chess; it all depends on the price we are ready to pay. Investing a queen or a whole rook in such an operation is usually too much; the most suitable for such sacrifices are the minor pieces.

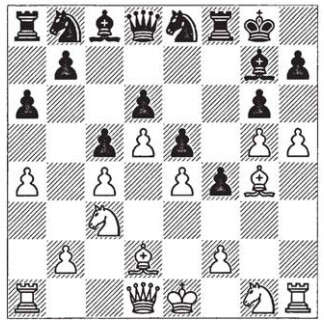
When we count the material on the board, we usually consider the pieces separately from the pawns. Therefore, giving up a knight or a bishop for one or two pawns without any immediate compensation requires a strong character and good nerves. Little wonder that the first two examples are chosen from the practice of Boris Spassky, the man who, by temperament, has been compared with an iceberg.

Prior to the following diagram, Spassky had played the opening in a careless way and obtained a strategically losing position. All his minor pieces are passive and, if play proceeded normally, White would be able to take his time preparing a kingside attack.

14...♘c7

This move seems to make little sense since Black will find it very difficult to create queenside counterplay based on ...b5, but Spassky's idea will be revealed one move later. After the more 'normal' 14...♖f7 15 ♗xc8 ♕xc8 play transposes to a previous nice win by Averbakh: 16 ♘f3 ♗f8 17 ♔e2 ♖g7 18 ♖h4 ♘d7 19 hxg6 hxg6 20 ♕h1 ♗e7 21 ♖h8+ ♔f7 22 ♕h6 ♘f8 23 ♖h1 ♖b8 24 ♗xf4! with a decisive

B



Averbakh – Spassky
USSR Ch play-off (Leningrad) 1956

advantage for White, Averbakh-Panno, Buenos Aires 1954.

It is possible that Spassky had seen this game, but had forgotten about it during the opening. If this is the case, we can understand why later, when he remembered it, he decided to change the course of the game at any cost.

15 ♗xc8 ♕xc8 16 ♘f3 ♘c6!!

This is probably one of the most extraordinary moves from the whole history of chess. However, according to Taimanov, who witnessed this remarkable moment, Spassky put the knight *en prise* without any apparent change in his usual unruffled demeanour. Averbakh was so shocked that he spent a whole hour deciding whether to accept the gift. In fact, there is no real choice: one of the black knights will reach the d4-square anyway, and it is better for White to be compensated with a material advantage.

17 dxc6 bxc6 *(D)*

As a consequence of the sacrifice, several black pieces have obtained active possibilities. First of all, the knight will go to d4, which will indirectly increase the power of the bishop, since it would be hard for White to refrain forever from the exchange ♘xd4 (or ♗xd4) ...exd4.

W

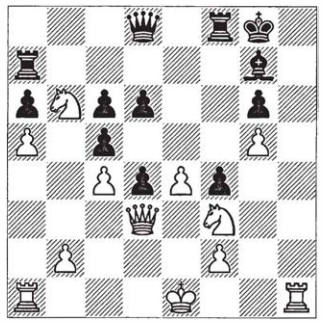
The b-file has become available to the black rooks and the initially useful move a4 looks more like a weakness now. For Averbakh, who had played without effort until now, and who was probably hoping to do so for the rest of the game based on his previous experience with the position, it was very difficult to adapt himself instantly to the new situation.

18 ♘h4?!

Averbakh still hopes to follow familiar patterns, but the kingside attack is less dangerous now and certainly double-edged, since it leaves the rest of the board with insufficient control. Instead of attacking, he should have taken some defensive measures, first of all against the pressure on the b-file: 18 a5! ♘e6 19 hxg6 (it is a good idea to keep the h-file open; the tempting 19 h6 forces the bishop back to h8, where it has no moves at all, but it is hard to believe that White could manage to make further progress without exchanging on d4 at some point, making the e5-square available) 19...hxg6 20 ♘a4 ♕d8 21 ♘b6 ♖a7 22 ♗c3 ♘d4 23 ♗xd4 exd4 24 ♕d3 *(D)*.

Averbakh ends the variation here, mentioning that 0-0-0 would follow, when "the extra piece is bound to have its say". However, I would remark that White's knights are not too active yet; they have more of a defensive role (closing the b-file and blocking the f-pawn). The most constructive plan seems to be to play b4, aiming to undermine the c5-square and, indirectly, the e5-square. At the same time, White must permanently reckon with pressure against e4 and possible infiltration by ...♕g4 or ...♕h3. From this perspective, after, for instance, 24...♕e7 a logical plan would be 25 ♔d2!? ♕e6 26 ♖h4

B



(preventing any possible incursion by the queen and tying the king's rook down to the defence of the f4-pawn) 26...♖e7 27 ♖b1 (based on the fact that 27...♕xe4 allows favourable simplifications with 28 ♕xe4 ♖xe4 29 ♖e1) intending to continue 28 b4 (threatening 29 bxc5 dxc5 30 e5) 28...cxb4 29 ♖xb4 planning ♖b2, ♖c2 and c5, but this is a long way off, and the position is likely to explode at any moment.

Another form of this plan would be based on 0-0-0, followed by ♖he1, ♔b1-a1, ♖b1, b4, but in this case Black could react with ..♔f7 and ...♖h8-h3. This suggests that the exchange on g6 might have been premature. In any case, it is far from clear whether White would have won the game, which adds value to Spassky's sacrifice.

18...♕e8 19 hxg6 hxg6 20 ♕g4 ♖b8 21 ♘d1 ♘e6 22 ♖a3 ♘d4 23 ♖ah3 ♕f7 *(D)*

W

Black has considerably improved his position, while the kingside attack is not too dangerous yet.

24 ♗c3 ♖fe8 25 ♖3h2 ♕xc4?

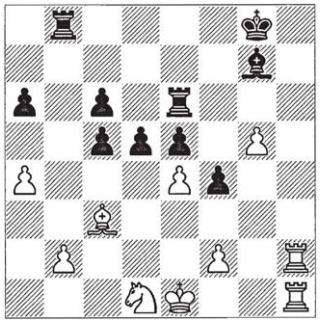
But this is exaggerated; Black could have played 25...d5 with unclear complications or simply waited with 25...♖b7.

26 ♘xg6 ♖e6 27 ♗xd4?

White chooses the wrong move-order; he can win by 27 ♖h8+! ♗xh8 (if 27...♔f7 then 28 ♗xd4 is correct) 28 ♖xh8+ ♔g7 29 ♖xb8 (quicker than 29 ♖h7+, as given by Averbakh) 29...f3 30 ♘f4!! exf4 31 ♕xf3 defending everything. If 31...♕d5 then 32 ♕h5 and it will be White who mates first.

27...♖xg6 28 ♕f5 ♕e6 29 ♕xe6+ ♖xe6 30 ♗c3 d5 *(D)*

W



It is remarkable that the exchange of queens has not increased White's winning chances. Black's central pawn-mass is very dangerous, while White's minor pieces are rather passive. Some of the following moves are also explained by White's acute time-trouble, a direct consequence of the shock suffered after the opening.

31 f3 ♖b3 32 ♖h3 c4 33 ♔d2 ♖g6 34 ♖g1 d4 35 ♗a5 ♗f8 36 ♖g4 ♖d6 37 ♔c2 ♖d7 38 g6 ♖db7 39 ♗e1 c5 40 ♖gh4 ♗g7 41 ♗a5 c3!

Black's initiative takes on a very concrete form.

42 bxc3

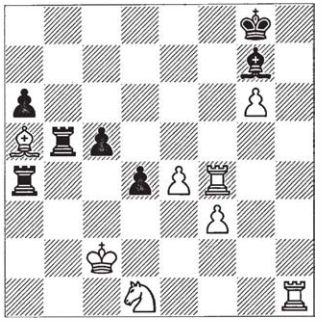
This was the sealed move; Averbakh had an unpleasant choice between this move and 42 ♗xc3 dxc3 43 bxc3 ♖a3.

42...♖a3 43 cxd4 exd4 44 ♖xf4 ♖a2+ 45 ♔d3

Not 45 ♔c1? allowing mate by 45...d3 and ...♖c2#.

45...♖b1 46 ♖h1 ♖xa4 47 ♔c2 ♖b5 *(D)*

W



Black is now close to winning. If the bishop moves, he will play 48...c4 with a devastating attack. Averbakh fires his last shot.

48 e5!?

This position could have also been the subject of Chapter 11.

48...d3+?!

Having played for so long a piece down, Spassky couldn't restrain himself from winning a whole rook in one move, but this gives White excellent saving chances. Averbakh reckons that after 48...♗xe5 49 ♖e4 c4 Black should win.

49 ♔xd3 ♖xf4 50 ♗c3 ♖xf3+ 51 ♔e4 ♖g3 52 ♔f4 ♖xg6 53 ♘e3 ♖b8 54 ♘f5 ♖f8 55 ♖h5 *(D)*

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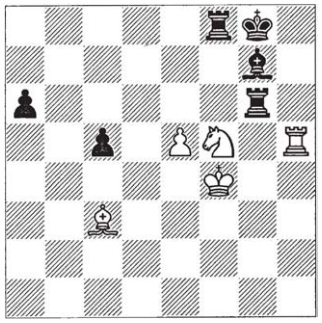
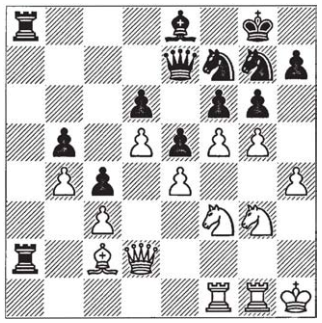


In spite of the huge material deficit, White dominates the board.

55...♖e8 56 ♔e4 ♖g1 57 ♖h3 ♗f8 58 ♔d5 ♖d1+ 59 ♔e4 ♖c1 60 ♔d5 ♖d1+ 61 ♔e4 ♖d7 62 ♘h6+ ♗xh6 63 ♖xh6 ♖h7 64 ♖g6+ ♔f7 65 ♖f6+ ♔e7 66 ♖c6 ♔d7 67 ♖xc5 ♖h6 68 ♔d5 ♖b6 69 ♗a5 ♖b5 70 ♖xb5 axb5 71 e6+ ♖xe6 72 ♔c5 ♖e5+ 73 ♔b6 ½-½

Equally remarkable is the following game:

B



Karpov – Spassky
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1973

White has an impressive spatial advantage on the kingside and most of his pieces are in attacking positions. However, Black still has resources. First of all, there is a double barrier between the aggressors and the king. Switching to the other wing, Black's firm control of the a-file is not really dangerous for the moment, but can seriously hinder White in his actions (for instance, because of the pin along the second rank).

A less obvious detail is the relative passivity of the white bishop. The only way to find an active job for this piece (which, in some cases, might land on the even worse square b1) is to sacrifice a knight with ♘f5 followed by ...gxf5, exf5 at some point. On the other hand, in case of major simplifications, this bishop would not only remain passive, but also become exposed, possibly compensating Black for a material disadvantage. All these general considerations must have crossed Spassky's mind during the game in less time than I needed to write them down, but making a concrete decision must have been more difficult, especially given that he was already short of time.

33...fxg5!!

Karpov writes that Black had to hurry with this exchange, since otherwise White would play ♘g4. This is rather a simplistic comment, since the move 33...♕d8 would parry the threat while avoiding the loss of the g7-knight. The problem is that an undefined pawn-structure would give White the possibility of starting a direct attack with 34 fxg6 hxg6 35 h5!. For instance:

a) 35...gxh5 36 gxf6 and with all his pieces in action, White is winning.

b) 35...♘xg5 36 ♘xg5 fxg5 37 h6 ♖b2!? (37...♘h5 38 ♘xh5 gxh5 39 ♖xg5+ leads to a quick win for White) 38 hxg7 ♖aa2 39 ♕h2! ♔xg7 40 ♖g2 followed by ♖gf2 and White should win.

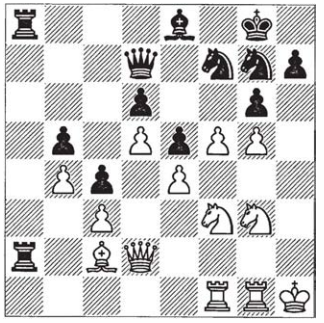
c) 35...fxg5 36 hxg6 ♘h8 (36...♘h6 loses to 37 ♕h2!) 37 ♘f5 with a clear advantage for White.

It is questionable whether Spassky saw all this but it is clear that he sensed how dangerous it would be to maintain the tension on the kingside – much more dangerous than losing the g7-knight. As a consequence of the sacrifice, Black should manage to consolidate, while leaving the white knights without active play.

34 hxg5 ♕d7 *(D)*

For the moment, 35 f6 is not dangerous because of 35...♕h3+ 36 ♘h2 ♘h5.

W



35 ♘h2

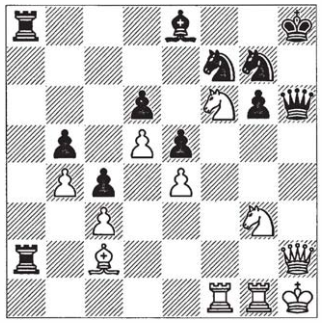
While praising Spassky's play during this phase of the game, Karpov shows himself to be unhappy about his own moves. Apparently, he considered his position before Black's 33rd move to be close to winning; this exaggerated evaluation led to a deformed general vision about what happened in the game. For instance, Karpov criticized his last move and recommended 35 ♖f2. However, I think that Black's

position is then no more difficult to play than in the game; for instance, 35...♖b2 36 ♖b1 (Black shouldn't be allowed to double rooks on his seventh rank) 36...♖xb1+ 37 ♗xb1 ♖a1 38 ♖f1 (after 38 ♕b2 ♕a7 White has to lose a tempo because of the threat of ...♖xb1+, and then 39 ♔g2 ♗d7 is safe for Black: the knight has got the e8-square while a direct attack is hardly possible due to the queenside tension) 38...♕c8! (planning ...♗d7) 39 f6? ♘h5 40 ♘xh5 ♕h3+ 41 ♔g1 ♕xh5 and it is now White who has problems.

35...♕d8 36 f6

It is hard, of course, to refrain from winning a piece for a pawn, especially when the opponent is in time-trouble. Karpov mentions that he didn't find any forced win after 36 fxg6 hxg6 37 ♘g4 ♕xg5 38 ♘f6+ ♔h8 39 ♕h2+ ♕h6 *(D)*. Black's position looks precarious, but it is not obvious how White can take advantage of it:

W



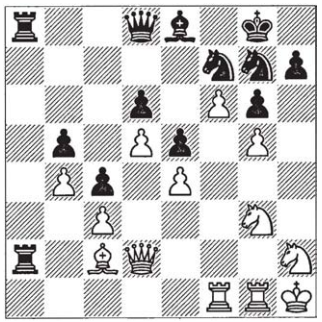
a) Karpov's preference is 40 ♖g2 to keep the other rook free for action on the f-file. However, this is of little relevance; for instance: 40...♖a1 41 ♗d1 (Karpov only gives 41 ♗b1 ♕xh2+ 42 ♖xh2+ ♘h5, when Black seems to be safe) 41...♖8a2! 42 ♖xa2 (42 ♗e2 is less effective now, because 42...♖xf1+ creates some discord) 42...♖xa2 43 ♕xh6+ ♘xh6 and now 44 ♘xe8 ♘xe8 45 ♖f8+ ♔g7 46 ♖xe8 leads nowhere because of 46...♖a1.

Although Karpov's lines are not too accurate, he mentions that an improvement for White is very likely to be found somewhere.

b) Probably best is 40 ♖f2 ♖a1 41 ♗d1! (Karpov only gives 41 ♕xh6+?! ♘xh6 42 ♖h2 ♘h5, when Black has no genuine difficulties) 41...♖8a2 42 ♗e2!, when White has considerably improved his position, while Black still has no way out from the curious tension created on the kingside.

Now we return to 36 f6 *(D)*:

B



36...♗d7?

Oddly enough, Karpov writes that Spassky plays this part of the game in the best possible way. 36...♘h5? also isn't a solution, of course, because of 37 ♘xh5 gxh5 38 g6 with a decisive attack.

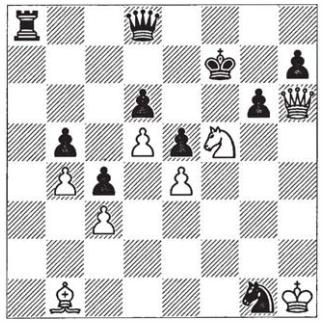
With his move, Spassky places the g4-square under control (which, as we shall see, shouldn't have been too relevant) and forces an immediate fxg7 (in view of the possible retreat ...♘e8, when Black has little to fear). This second detail is also of little importance, since fxg7 is part of White's plan anyway. Black should have started active operations on the queenside at once with 36...♖b2. For instance:

a) 37 fxg7 ♖aa2 38 ♖c1 ♕xg5 is a big improvement for Black compared to the game.

b) 37 ♖a1 could lead to an endgame where White's extra piece is not too relevant: 37...♗d7 38 fxg7 ♖xa1 39 ♖xa1 ♕xg5 40 ♕xg5 ♘xg5 41 ♗d1 ♔xg7 42 ♖a7 ♖b1 43 ♖xd7+ ♘f7 44 ♔g2 ♖xd1 45 ♖b7 ♖d2+ 46 ♔h3 ♖d3 and Black should be OK because of the lack of coordination of the white knights.

c) 37 ♖b1 ♖xb1!? (37...♖ba2 is also playable – compare with the adjourned position below) 38 ♗xb1 (38 ♖xb1 temporarily lessens the pressure on the kingside, allowing 38...♘h5 39 ♘xh5 gxh5 40 ♗d1 ♘h8 planning ...♗g6 and ...♘f7 with a solid position for Black) 38...♗d7 39 fxg7 and now, without a white rook on the f-file, 39...♘xg5 with the idea ...♘h3-f4 is possible. Then White should probably play 40 ♘f5 but Black seems to be able to hold: 40...♘h3 41 ♘g4 ♗xf5 42 ♘h6+ ♔xg7 43 ♘xf5+ ♔f7 44 ♕h6 ♘xg1 *(D)*, and then:

W



c1) After 45 ♕g7+ ♔e8 46 ♕g8+ ♔d7 47 ♕f7+ ♔c8 48 ♘e7+ ♔c7, 49 ♘c6+ ♕d7 gives White no real attack, while taking the knight with 49 ♔xg1 is strongly answered by 49...♕d7 threatening ...♖e8 or ...♖a1, with a winning position in both cases.

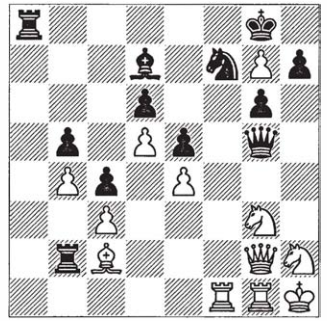
c2) 45 ♕xh7+ ♔f6 46 ♕g7+ ♔g5 47 ♕h6+ (47 ♔xg1 ♕h8 is similar to the main line, and 48 ♕e7+?! ♕f6! is certainly no improvement) 47...♔f6 48 ♔xg1?! (perpetual check would be a safer decision) 48...♕h8 49 ♕xh8+ ♖xh8 50 ♘xd6. An instructive moment: the apparently strong attack led only to mass piece exchanges; the white bishop is left stranded on the queenside and Black can win it with 50...♖a8!.

37 fxg7 ♕xg5 38 ♕g2

Karpov's might have thought that, being a piece up, he should just make some moves until the adjournment and then find the most accurate way to win. In fact, as the game shows, the future is Black's and therefore concrete action was called for. Karpov gives 38 ♕f2! (it appears that 36...♗d7 weakened the f7-square) 38...♕f4 (forced) 39 ♘f5! "with a considerable advantage for White". This is entirely correct: rather than sticking to his material advantage, White brings both his h2-knight and c2-bishop into play. Black is short of just one tempo (the one he lost with 36...♗d7) to get counterplay: 39...gxf5 40 exf5 ♕xf2 41 ♖xf2 ♖xc2 (or, similarly, 41...♗xf5 42 ♖xf5 ♖xc2 43 ♘g4 winning) 42 ♘g4! ♔xg7 43 ♘xe5+ and the black king has no good squares to retreat to.

38...♖b2 *(D)*

W



39 ♖b1

Played by general principles, again. Karpov wants to prevent ...♖aa2. It was still not late for 39 ♕f2! ♕f4 40 ♘f5; for instance:

a) 40...♖aa2 leaves the back rank undefended and White can play 41 ♕b6! (worse is 41 ♘e3? ♖xc2! 42 ♘xc2 ♕xe4+ and, despite being a rook down, Black is better: 43 ♖g2 ♗f5 44 ♖c1 ♗h3) when the extravagant 41...♕xe4+ 42 ♘f3 ♗xf5 43 ♗xe4 ♗xe4 should not really give Black enough compensation after the calm 44 ♖g3.

b) 40...♕xf2 41 ♖xf2 gxf5 (or 41...♖aa2 42 ♘e3! – Karpov) 42 exf5 ♖aa2 fails again to create counterplay to just one tempo: 43 ♘g4 ♔xg7 and now 44 ♘xe5+ is best (44 ♘h6+? given by Karpov as leading to mate is in fact bad in view of 44...♘g5!).

c) 40...gxf5 41 exf5 ♖aa2 42 ♕b6 and once again Black has to sacrifice the queen, under not entirely satisfactory circumstances: 42...♕xh2+ 43 ♔xh2 ♖xc2+ 44 ♔g3 and the black king is more exposed than his white counterpart.

In any case, it is more likely that Black can find an improvement in one of these lines than after the immediate 38 ♕f2.

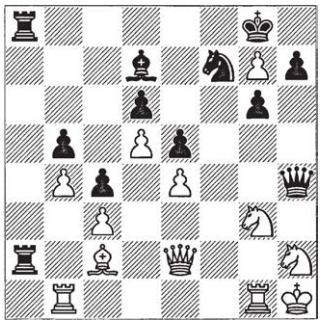
39...♖ba2 40 ♕e2?

The 'custom' of spoiling better positions by blitzing in the opponent's time-trouble has followed Karpov throughout his whole carrier. It manifested itself in a chronic form during his match against Korchnoi in Baguio 1978. By all

Soviet precepts, White should repeat the position with 40 ♖bf1 in order to reach the time-control and have time to seal the strongest move. By avoiding the repetition, Karpov probably hoped that Spassky's 40th move would be a mistake because of the time-pressure.

40...♕h4 *(D)*

W



The game was adjourned here and Karpov had to seal his next move. White is already worse; as incredible as it might seem, White's extra piece is of little importance. All his minor pieces are very passive. Using the respite granted by his opponent, Black managed to avoid immediate threats and is ready for active play, starting with ...♗h3 and ...♘g5.

41 ♖bf1 ♗h3 42 ♖f2 ♘g5 43 ♕e3 ♗g4 44 ♖gf1 ♔xg7 45 ♗d1

White finally manages to get rid of his bishop, but he will soon lose a third pawn.

45...♗xd1 46 ♖xd1 ♖a1 47 ♖df1

Relatively best. Both 47 ♖fd2 ♖8a2 and 47 ♖ff1 ♖8a2 (Karpov) leave White with bigger problems.

47...♖xf1+ 48 ♖xf1 ♖a2 49 ♖f2 ♖a1+ 50 ♖f1 ♖a2 51 ♖f2 ♖a1+ 52 ♖f1 ♖xf1+ 53 ♘gxf1 ♕xe4+ 54 ♔g1 ♕xe3+

Karpov mentions that he was more afraid of 54...♕h4 (planning ...♘h3+ and ...♘f4), when White's best chance is to play 55 ♕a7+ ♔h6 56 ♕e3, pinning the knight.

55 ♘xe3 ♘e4 56 ♘d1 ♘f6 57 ♘e3 h5

Activating the king as soon as possible with 57...♔h6 might be better.

58 ♘f3 ♘e4 59 ♘d1 ½-½

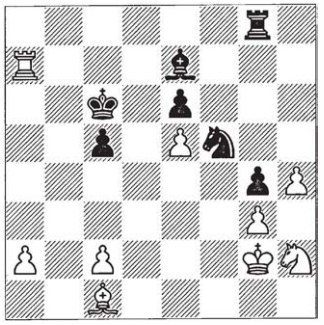
Black could play on, but White does not lack counterplay. He could transfer a knight to a3, forcing the black knight to go back to c7; with the other knight on e3 a sacrifice on c4 would offer adequate counterplay.

Spassky went on to win the championship by a margin of a whole point over a compact group of players, including Karpov. This game, played in the first half of the tournament, was therefore of crucial importance. It is also the kind of game that remains for a long time in the memory of both players. In the long run, however, it did a disservice to Spassky, who probably underestimated Karpov before their candidates match one year later.

This was in fact only the second act of the same drama: before the match against Fischer, Spassky was supposed to play some training games with the young and talented Karpov. Winning the first game with the same opening (Ruy Lopez) and after a similar scenario, Spassky decided that he was in good form and didn't need any more training. The match in Reykjavik was a long series of cold showers...

The role of the pawns usually increases in the endgame. The next two examples are taken from this phase of the game.

B



Socko – Kharlov
Batumi Ech 2002

Black's control of the light squares offers him some compensation for the two pawns. His construction on the kingside looks impressive, but has rather a static character. This would offer good possibilities of resistance against a local major-piece attack, but not against two passed rooks' pawns. White's plan is simple:

consolidate with ♗f4 and then play a4-a5 and h5-h6. Therefore, Kharlov's decision, to change the course of the game radically, must be regarded as correct.

36...♗xh4! 37 gxh4 ♘xh4+

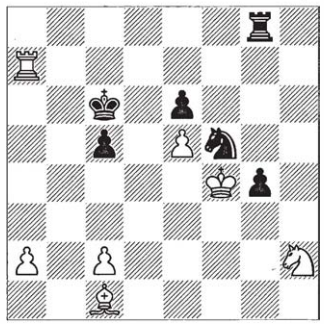
By sacrificing the bishop, Black has brought three of his pieces to life; White will manage to avoid the perpetual but will be forced to make some concessions.

38 ♔g3

38 ♔g1 g3 39 ♘f1 leads to an immediate draw: 39...♘f3+ 40 ♔g2 ♘h4+.

38...♘f5+ 39 ♔f4 *(D)*

B



39...♘d4

Black creates the threats of ...♘e2+ and ...g3.

Shortly after 36...♗xh4, I saw Kharlov walking through the playing hall, with that kind of excitement typical for somebody who has just initiated a spectacular variation. I didn't speak with him about this game and definitely cannot read minds, but judging from his behaviour at that moment I suspect that his initial intention wasn't really to win back the piece and get the unpleasant ending from the game.

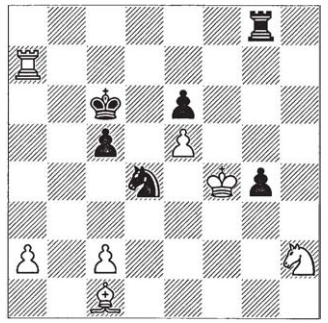
The alternative is to push the g-pawn as far as possible: 39...g3 40 ♘f3 g2 41 ♘g1. Black is a whole piece down, but his coordination is clearly superior:

a) 41...♖f8 looks very tempting and might have formed part of Kharlov initial thoughts, but fails in an elegant way: 42 ♖a6+ ♔d5 43 c4+! ♔xc4 44 ♖xe6 ♘g7+ 45 ♖f6 ♘h5+ 46 ♔f5 ♘xf6 47 exf6 and White should win; for instance, 47...♔d5 48 ♗h6 ♖f7 49 ♘h3 ♔d6 50 ♔g6 ♔e6 51 ♗g7 ♖a7 52 ♘f4+ ♔d6 53 ♘xg2 ♖xa2 54 ♘f4 and the f-pawn is too strong.

b) 41...♖b8 42 ♗e3 ♖b2 43 c4 ♖c2 (Black creates the unpleasant threat of 44...♖xc4+ 45 ♔f3 ♖c3) 44 ♖a6+ (it is useful to push the black king back) 44...♔d7 45 ♖a3 (after 45 ♖a4 ♔c6 White cannot make any useful move; ♖a3 seems the only way to coordinate the pieces) 45...♖xc4+ 46 ♔f3 ♖c2 47 ♗f2 (necessary in order to attack the pawn; the attempt to bring the rook to a better position with 47 ♖d3+ ♔c6 48 ♖d2 {after 48 ♗d2 ♖xa2 it is hard to see how White can make any progress} fails to 48...♖c3 49 ♖e2 ♘d4+) 47...♔c6! 48 ♔xg2 ♔d5 49 ♘f3 ♘d4 when, in spite of the huge material disadvantage, Black can hope for a draw in view of his very active pieces and the reduced number of pawns. For instance, 50 ♖a5 ♔e4 maintaining the centralized position. The colour of the a-pawn's promoting square also favours Black. It is difficult to say whether this variation is better than Kharlov's, but it is a good illustration of the defensive possibilities of the position.

We now return to 39...♘d4 *(D)*:

W



40 ♘xg4

This is the best way to return the piece. The white knight will be very strong in the ensuing ending. Black has no problems maintaining equality after 40 ♗e3 g3 41 ♘g4 g2; for instance, 42 c4 (or if 42 ♖f7, placing the f4-square under control and preventing the perpetual check from the main line, then 42...♘e2+ 43 ♔f3 g1♕ 44 ♗xg1 ♘xg1+ 45 ♔g3 ♘e2+ 46 ♔h3 ♖a8!) 42...♘e2+ 43 ♔f3 g1♕ 44 ♗xg1 ♘xg1+ 45 ♔g3 (White is a pawn up and would have winning chances if only Black couldn't force a perpetual) 45...♘e2+ 46 ♔h4 (or 46

♔h3 ♘f4+ 47 ♔h4 ♘g2+ when 48 ♔g3? loses the knight to 48...♘e3) 46...♖h8+ 47 ♔g5 ♖g8+ and the white king cannot escape the mechanism.

40...♘e2+ 41 ♔f3 ♘d4+

It is a good idea to push the king to the edge before winning the bishop.

42 ♔g3 ♘e2+ 43 ♔h4 ♘xc1 44 ♖a6+ ♔b5?

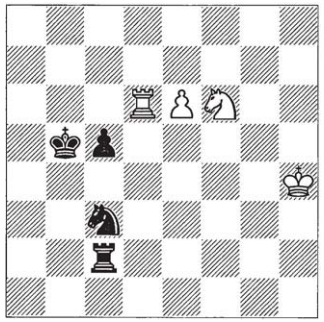
The d5- and d7-squares were mined because of the fork on f6. Kharlov instinctively chose the seemingly more active square but he forgot that the most dangerous way for the king to be cut off in a rook ending is along a rank. After the more prudent 44...♔b7 45 ♖xe6 ♘xa2 Black is entitled to hope for a draw.

45 ♖xe6 ♘xa2 46 ♖d6 ♘c3

Maybe he should have tried 46...c4 clearing the c5-square for the king.

47 ♘f6 ♖g2 48 e6 ♖xc2 *(D)*

It is already too late for 48...♖e2 49 ♔g4 c4 because the advanced pawn would get supplementary support: 50 ♔f5 ♔c5 51 ♖d7 and e7-e8♕ is unstoppable.



49 ♔g5?

The only explanation for this move is the FIDE time-limit. White not only refrains from advancing the pawn, but also places the king on a bad square. 49 e7 appears to be winning:

a) After 49...♖h2+ the only thing White need do is avoid the g5- and g3-squares, in view of the fork on e4 after the sequence ...♖e2, e8♕ ♖xe8. This is easily achieved by 50 ♔g4 ♖g2+ 51 ♔f5.

b) 49...♖e2 50 e8♕+ ♖xe8 51 ♘xe8. Without knights on the board this position would be winning for White. It is hard to believe that Black can escape here either; for instance: 51...c4 52 ♔g4 ♘e4 53 ♖d8 c3 54 ♖c8 ♘c5 55 ♘c7+ ♔b4 56 ♘d5+ ♔c4 57 ♘xc3.

49...♔c4?

Not a very logical move: Black blocks the way of his own pawn. Better is 49...♖e2; for instance: 50 ♔g6 c4 51 ♔f7 ♘e4! (simplifying to a drawn ending) 52 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 53 e7 ♖xe7+ 54 ♔xe7 c3 and White cannot do much against the far-advanced pawn.

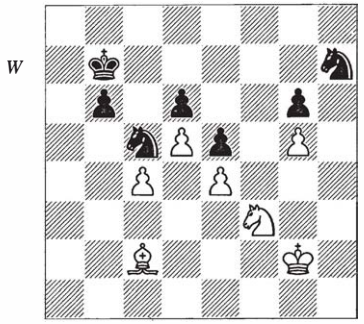
50 ♖a6?

Now 50 e7? only leads to a draw: 50...♖e2 51 ♖d7 ♘e4+. However, the more active 50 ♔g6, besides the indisputable aesthetic effect, with both armies aligned in similar ways, causes unsolvable problems; for instance: 50...♖e2 51 ♔f7 ♘e4 52 ♘xe4 ♖xe4 53 e7 ♖xe7+ 54 ♔xe7 ♔b3 55 ♖b6+! winning.

50...♔b5

The game ended in a draw after 11 more moves played at a too high a speed to be worth mentioning here.

Here is a game I had almost forgotten. It also contains a plea for seriousness when analysing or annotating a game for publishing purposes.



Marin – Barlov
Kastel Stari (Balkaniad) 1988

Around this point, the game was adjourned. White's position looks hopeless: he has a bad bishop and faces the immediate danger of a queenside invasion.

The pawn-structure is typical for the King's Indian. Although from a strategic point of view such a configuration tends to favour White, the space advantage in the centre and on the kingside seems to lack any significance in this concrete case, since there is no obvious way to penetrate with the pieces.

I imagine that this was exactly what Barlov thought, failing to foresee my plan during his adjournment analysis; otherwise, he could have posed me much greater problems than he actually did.

This is, to a certain extent, excusable, because White's idea is not trivial at all. What I cannot really understand is my superficiality when annotating the fragment for the endgame section of *Informator*, as well as the Yugoslav publishers' readiness to include my comments in the 46th volume.

1 ♔g3!

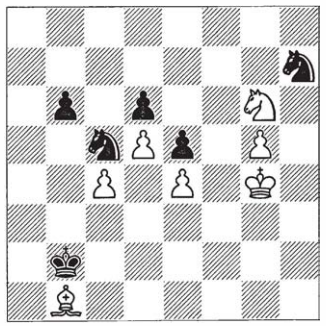
The king seems to be heading for a dead end. A face-to-face defence wouldn't succeed: 1 ♔f2 ♔a6 2 ♔e3 ♔a5 3 ♔d2 ♔b4 4 ♗d3 ♔b3 5 ♔e3 ♔c3 6 ♗e2 ♘a4 7 ♘h4 ♘xg5 8 ♘xg6 ♘b2 and the b-pawn will decide the game.

1...♔a6 2 ♔g4

The g-pawn needed to be defended in order to make ♘h4 possible, but this threat seems easy to parry.

2...♔a5 3 ♘h4 ♘f8

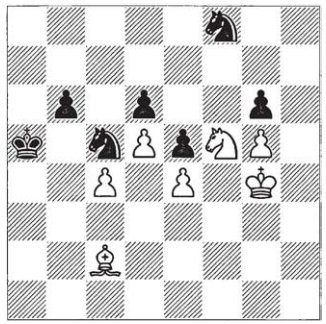
This is the critical line. Barlov must have finally understood my idea; under the surprise, he overestimated its merits and played the nervous 3...♔b4?. White can now choose between several lines where he is not worse at all. The game continued 4 ♘xg6 ♔c3 (after 4...♔xc4 5 ♘e7 Black is suddenly in trouble) 5 ♗b1?! (much simpler is 5 ♗d1, a move that I didn't even mention; for instance, 5...♘xe4 6 ♘xe5! with a probable draw) 5...♔b2 *(D)* and now:



a) I discarded the natural 6 ♘e7 because of 6...♔xb1 7 g6 ♘f6+ 8 ♔f5 ♘e8 (as I discovered recently, 8...♘cxe4? 9 ♘c8 ♔c2 10 g7 ♔d3 11 ♘xd6 is winning for White); in fact, the position is still equal, but both players have to play carefully: 9 ♘g8! ♘g7+ (9...♔c2? is too slow: 10 ♘f6 ♘g7+ 11 ♔g5 and White seems to be winning again) 10 ♔f6 ♘h5+ 11 ♔g5 ♘f4 12 ♘f6 ♘xg6 13 ♔xg6 ♔c2 14 ♔f7 ♔d3 15 ♔e7 ♔xc4 16 ♔xd6. Now both sides have managed to eliminate key pawns from their opponent's structure, but the b-pawn seems to be a slightly faster runner. Therefore, after 16...b5 White has to head for a draw with 17 ♘g4.

b) 6 ♘xe5 (I had attached an '!' to this move) 6...dxe5 (6...♔xb1? 7 g6 ♘f6+ 8 ♔f5 ♘cxe4 is bad because of 9 ♘d7!, winning) 7 g6 ♘f6+ 8 ♔f5 ♘e8 9 ♔xe5 ♔xb1 (a symbolic moment: White has sacrificed his initially passive minor pieces to eliminate Black's weak King's Indian structure) 10 d6! (after 10 ♔d4 ♔c2, 11 e5? ♘b3+ 12 ♔e4 ♔c3 13 d6 ♔xc4 allows the black king to get back just in time, since 14 d7 is not possible owing to 14...♘c5+; however, 11 d6!, clearing the d5-square for the king, still draws) and the players agreed to a draw in view of the line 10...♔c2 11 ♔d5 ♘f6+ 12 ♔c6 ♘fxe4 13 d7 ♘xd7 14 ♔xd7 ♘f6+ 15 ♔e6 ♘h5.

4 ♘f5! *(D)*



The key move in White's plan. The sacrifice is based on already familiar elements: adding value to the space advantage, as in Socko-Kharlov, or improving the pawn-structure, as in Averbakh-Spassky.

4...gxf5+

This is the best moment to take the knight. After 4...♘b7 5 ♗d3! (under no circumstances should White move the knight from its dominant position; in my initial comments I gave 5 ♘e7 ♔b4 6 ♘c8 'with equality', but after 6...♔xc4 7 ♘xb6+ ♔c3 followed by ...♔d4 Black has good winning chances) 5...♔b4 6 ♗f1, Black cannot seriously consider ...gxf5, because of his passive knight on b7. He can, however, try to put White in zugzwang: 6...♔c3 7 ♗e2 ♔d2 (Black could get this position with White to move, but this wouldn't be a zugzwang: 8 ♗f1 ♔d2 9 ♔h4!) 8 ♗f1 ♔e1 9 ♗d3 ♔f2 10 ♗c2 (10 ♔h4? is bad now because of 10...♔f3) 10...♔e2 (after 10...♔e1 11 ♗d3 Black is making no progress). Black has deprived the bishop of some important squares, but the exposed position of the king on a light square creates new defensive possibilities: 11 ♗a4! (threatening ♗c6) 11...♘c5 12 ♗b5! and the e-pawn is indirectly defended. 12...gxf5+ 13 exf5 is less favourable for Black than in the main line, because the bishop already controls the important d7-square.

5 exf5

In *Informator*, the variation ends here with an abrupt '+–'.

Youth is no excuse for massacring the truth in such a way. The Informator annotation system has its unquestionable merits, but faces the annotators with a dangerous psychological trap: since the text of an annotated game is so short, the natural tendency is to allocate proportional importance and time to the annotations themselves, leading to the publication of authentic analytical monstrosities.

In fact, White has to work hard to survive in this position.

5...e4 6 g6 ♘fd7! *(D)*

7 g7

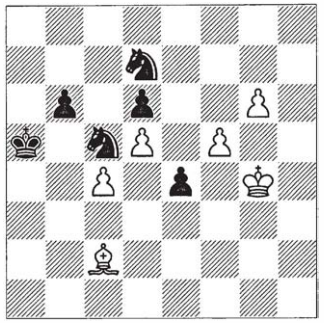
The point is that White has no time for 7 ♔g5 because of 7...e3! 8 ♗d1 ♘e4+, safely blockading the pawns.

7...♘f6+ 8 ♔g5 ♘cd7

Black has managed to stabilize the situation on the kingside and threatens to march in with the king.

9 ♗d1

The bishop hurries to defend the c4-pawn. 9 ♔g6 is too slow: 9...♔b4! (the alternative 9...e3?



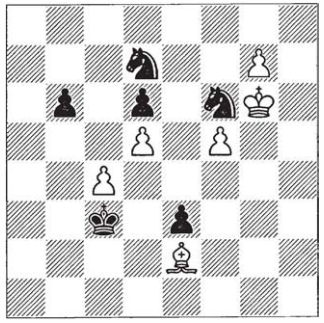
is considerably weaker: 10 ♗d3 ♔b4 11 ♗f1 ♔c3 12 ♔f7 ♔d2 13 g8♕ ♘xg8 14 ♔xg8 e2 15 ♗xe2 ♔xe2 16 ♔f7 and White achieves a draw) 10 ♗xe4 ♔xc4 11 ♔f7 ♔d4! 12 ♗g2 ♔e5 and Black should win.

9...♔b4 10 ♗e2

White's main idea, as we shall see, is to attack the d7-knight. A possible sequence would then be ...e2, ♗xd7 ♘g8, ♗e6 e1♕, ♗xg8, when Black has nothing better than perpetual check. However, the immediate 10 ♗h5? e3 11 ♗e8 fails to 11...♘h7+! 12 ♔f4 e2! 13 g8♕ e1♕, when both knights are taboo because of ...♕f2 winning the queen in two moves.

10...♔c3 11 ♔g6 e3 *(D)*

11...♔d2 would also be met by 12 c5.



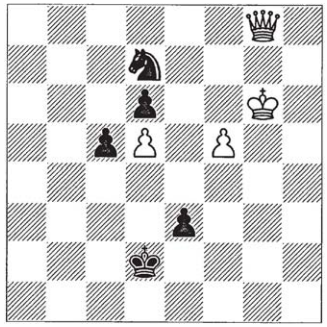
12 c5!

The best practical chance: White opens an important diagonal for the bishop. He is a tempo short to reach a draw in all other lines; for instance, 12 ♔f7 ♔d2 13 ♗f1 e2 14 ♗xe2 ♔xe2 15 g8♕ (or 15 ♔e6 ♔d3 16 g8♕ ♘xg8 17 ♔xd7 ♘f6+ 18 ♔xd6 ♔xc4 19 ♔c6 ♘xd5 20 f6 b5 21 f7 ♘e7+ and after stopping the f-pawn Black wins easily) 15...♘xg8 16 ♔xg8 ♔d3 (White is a whole tempo down compared to the sideline from the comment on White's 9th move) 17 ♔f7 ♔xc4 18 ♔e6 ♘c5+ 19 ♔xd6 b5 20 ♔c6 ♘b7! (a completely unexpected move in what might seem a drawish position) 21 d6 (or 21 f6 ♘d8+ 22 ♔d7 ♔xd5, and Black wins) 21...♘d8+ 22 ♔d7 ♔d5 23 ♔e7 ♘c6+ 24 ♔d7 b4 and Black's b-pawn decides again.

12...bxc5 13 ♗b5 ♔d2

Other moves fail to pose problems; for instance, 13...c4 14 ♗xd7 ♘xd7 15 g8♕ e2 16 ♕a8! ♘e5+ 17 ♔g7 ♔d2 18 ♕a2+ and a draw by repetition represents the most likely result. Or 13...♘g8 14 ♗xd7 e2 15 ♗e6 e1♕ 16 ♗xg8 reaching the already mentioned drawish position.

14 ♗xd7 ♘xd7 15 g8♕ *(D)*



White has promoted first, but the e-pawn is unstoppable.

15...e2 16 ♕d8!? ♘e5+ 17 ♔f6 e1♕ 18 ♕xd6 ♘d3 19 ♕e6

In spite of the material deficit, White should be able to hold a draw; his passed pawns are very strong.

13 Two Minor Pieces for a Rook

Chapter 11 (Exchange Sacrifices) illustrated that there are many situations where a minor piece is no weaker than a rook. We shall now try to prove quite the opposite: that a rook can, under certain circumstances, successfully fight against two minor pieces. If Petrosian was in a certain way the 'inventor' of the exchange sacrifice, it was not difficult to find a world champion whose games can be used as examples for the present chapter either: the 'magician' Mikhail Tal more than once stated that exchanging two pieces for a rook was his favourite sacrifice.

There is logic behind all this: Petrosian relied more on the static factors of the position; he tried to close the play and get stable squares for the minor pieces. In such conditions, the probability of successful exchange sacrifices is high. Tal also liked to sacrifice the exchange, but for more dynamic purposes, such as maintaining the initiative or getting mating threats. However, contrary to Petrosian, he enjoyed very much more to play with the rooks, those strong and mobile pieces that occupy open files or weakened seventh ranks.

Nominally, two minor pieces are more or less equal to a rook plus 1½ pawns. We can easily conclude that situations with complete equality are rare: there is no such piece as '1½ pawns'. I shall enumerate the cases when a rook is dangerous for the minor pieces.

First of all, there is the typical endgame with equal pawns on the kingside and an outside passed pawn on the a- or b-file. Lacking stable points on the queenside, the minor pieces have a tough job fighting against the pawn.

Regarding the endgame, there is another important detail to be mentioned: the player with two rooks (versus the opponent's rook and two minor pieces) should aim to exchange one pair of rooks. In most positions there is, for each side, a coordinator of play (like in soccer) and a rook is a good coordinator for the minor pieces. In the absence of the rook, the king has to do this job, but, depending on the situation, he might have to abandon a whole wing of pawns in order to support the pieces, thus allowing the enemy rook to start grabbing.

If the distance between the wings is large (for instance, if there are three open files in the centre) the minor pieces from one flank can hardly cooperate with their 'overseas' colleagues, especially if the enemy rook(s) are active in the centre.

Sometimes, as a result of the sacrifice, the minor pieces are uncoordinated and in undefended positions; if the side with a rook plays with energy, the pieces might never recover their coordination again; on the other hand, if they manage to regroup, the rook is often left without scope.

Generally, this kind of sacrifice is not too popular. It seems that it is more difficult to master all its subtleties than in the case of exchange or queen sacrifices. A sustained dynamic approach is usually needed, preventing the opponent's pieces from getting coordinated.

During the analysis presented below, I shall repeatedly refer to the 4-volume set of Tal's annotated games published by *Chess Stars*. For convenience I shall use the abbreviation *CS*.

We shall first examine a game where a remarkable battle of principles took place: Petrosian's minor pieces against Tal's rook (*see following diagram*):

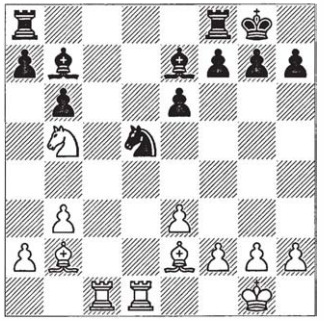
Petrosian had chosen a 'slow' opening and got what he wanted: a slightly better position with a symmetrical pawn-structure. White has a small lead in development: his rooks have already occupied the central files, but Tal now converts his temporary minor-piece activity (especially the d5-knight) into something very familiar to him.

16...♗c5!?

Moving another minor piece to what might seem a rather unstable position.

17 ♗f3 ♘xe3!

The position with an isolated pawn which could arise following 17...a6 18 ♘c7 ♖ad8 (or



Petrosian – Tal
USSR Cht (Moscow) 1964

18...♘xc7 19 ♗xb7 ♖ab8 20 ♗f3 and the bishop-pair guarantees White a stable advantage) 19 ♘xd5 should be in principle tenable for Black, but would it be a wise idea to allow Petrosian to use his endgame technique?!

18 ♗xb7

The only move. After 18 fxe3? ♗xf3 19 gxf3 ♗xe3+ 20 ♔f1 ♗xc1 21 ♖xc1 ♖ac8 Black has a material advantage.

18...♘xd1 19 ♖xd1

White has no chances to trap the black knight after 19 ♗xa8 ♘xb2 20 ♗e4 ♖d8 followed by ...♖d2.

19...♖ad8 20 ♘c3!

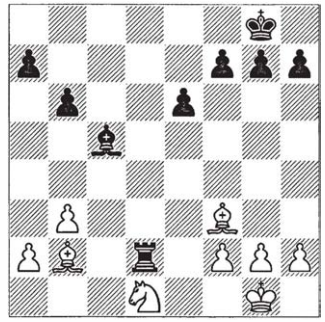
White should be careful not to lose his piece coordination; e.g., 20 ♖xd8? ♖xd8 21 ♔f1 ♖d2 with disaster along the second rank.

20...♖xd1+

20...♗d4 is worth considering, creating an unpleasant pin, but we already know that exchanging a pair of rooks makes the coordination of the minor pieces more difficult. It is remarkable that, once Tal got his favourite piece balance, he ignored temporary factors and concentrated on the stable ones: once exchanged, the rooks will never appear on the board again, while against the pins there are always remedies...

21 ♘xd1 ♖d8 22 ♗f3 ♖d2 *(D)*

The series of forced moves has come to an end and both players have obtained what they wanted. In conditions of relative material equality, all the white pieces defend themselves perfectly, preventing any further progress by



Black. On the other hand, Tal proves that it is not so easy to drive the rook away from the second rank. Although from here until the end of the game, Petrosian is the only player seeking winning chances, the fight will be marked by the sign of equality.

23 ♔f1

The king approaches to support the minor pieces.

23...a5

CS attaches an '?!' to this move and recommends 23...♗xf2 24 ♗c3 ♖c2 25 ♗e4 ♖c1 mentioning that 26 ♔e2 (with the threat of ♔d2, trapping the rook) is not dangerous in view of 26...♗h4 and the bishop will be transferred to the c1-h6 diagonal. The simple 26 ♔xf2 might be more unpleasant for Black. The position with two bishops against the rook is rather tricky. The black majority is not so easy to advance, since the bishops could become dangerous, while the queenside pawns might come under attack from the bishops. If one of them were lost, then Black's position would become critical. We should also mention that Black would have given up the second rank, which, in the game, he managed to control until the very end. Considering the pluses (in fact, just one pawn) and the minuses (pair of white bishops, loss of the second rank, etc.). I believe that Tal's strategy was better. These are, however, only general considerations and in order to convince the reader (and myself!) I will suggest a possible continuation of the game: White would push his pawns to b4 and a5, while Black should probably try to bring his king to c7 (to defend the b6-pawn) but then his counterpart would get chances to infiltrate on the kingside,

whether Black advances his pawns or not. In principle, Black would have an unpleasant defensive task.

24 ♗e2

Petrosian prepares to play a4, to get some freedom for his dark-squared bishop. He might also have secretly hoped to gain space with f4.

The attempt to drive the rook away with 24 ♔e1 fails to 24...♗b4, when the king should retreat, since 25 ♗c3 is met by 25...♖xd1+.

The immediate 24 a4 loses the b3-pawn: 24...♖d3 25 ♗c3 ♗b4! and the counterplay against the b6-pawn with 26 ♗xb4 axb4 27 ♘b2 ♖xb3 28 ♘c4 fails to 28...♖c3!, so the white pieces have to remain passive.

24...e5

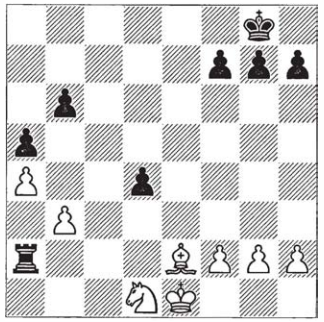
Very energetic play again. Tal prepares the exchange of the dark-squared bishops, to make his rook's position on White's second rank more stable.

25 a4

The pawn exchange 25 ♗xe5 ♖xa2 favours Black. With the white king still passive, a queenside majority would be dangerous. Here is a possible trick for Black: 26 ♗c4 ♖d2 27 ♘e3 b5! and Black will create a passed pawn since 28 ♗xb5 ♗xe3 29 fxe3 ♖d5 costs White one of his bishops. Petrosian's original intention (when he played 24 ♗e2) might have been 25 a3, to control the b4-square and threaten ♔e1, but since it became evident that Tal planned ...♗d4, he decided to move the pawn to a4.

25...♗d4 26 ♗xd4 exd4 27 ♔e1 ♖a2 *(D)*

W



Black has achieved a lot: the rook feels very comfortable on the second rank and the d-pawn is a potential danger for White, especially after the centralization of the black king. As compensation, Petrosian has obtained the blockading square d3 for his knight.

28 g4 ♔f8 29 f4 ♔e7

With the rook isolated on the queenside, Black is in no position to challenge White's space advantage on the other wing.

30 ♘f2 ♖a1+ 31 ♔d2 ♖a2+ 32 ♔e1

White has to make slight concessions to avoid a repetition. After the pseudo-active 32 ♔d3? Black would suddenly start playing for an advantage with 32...♖b2. With his pieces hanging on the second rank, White cannot prevent his queenside pawns from being captured.

32...♖a1+ 33 ♗d1 ♖a2

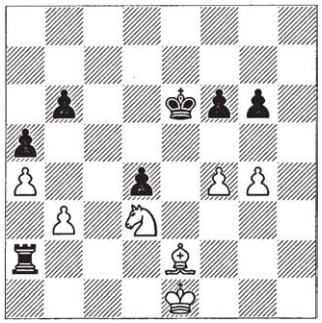
Not allowing 34 ♔d2 ♖a2+ 35 ♗c2.

34 h4 f6 35 h5 ♔e6 36 ♘d3 g6 37 hxg6

Black is, of course, happy to get rid of his potential weakness on h7 and of the dangerous candidate for promotion represented by the h5-pawn. However, it seems that White could not avoid this exchange; for instance: 37 ♗e2 gxh5 38 gxh5 ♔f5 with strong counterplay. White's far-advanced pawns have become weak. Maybe White should have refrained from playing h5.

37...hxg6 38 ♗e2 *(D)*

B



38...♖c2

The immediate 38...g5 (or, maybe, just a waiting move with the king) is simpler. Could Tal have missed the fact that his next move will, in fact, not threaten the b-pawn? Or, pressed by time, was he afraid of a white plan aiming to trap the rook on a2? Let's have a look: 39 fxg5 fxg5 40 ♔d1 ♔d5 41 ♗f3+ ♔d6 42 ♔c1 (planning ♗d1 and ♗c2 or ♘b2) 42...♖h2!. Just in time! The rook should avoid being isolated on the same side as the white king. If White tries to regroup as in the game with 43 ♘b2 Black gets dangerous counterplay by 43...♔c5 44 ♘c4 ♔b4. I am more inclined to believe in the second explanation for Black's 38th move: Tal is more likely to have had some abstract fears than to have missed a simple tactical trick. Even though, great players are also human...

Anyway, as a consequence of 38...♖c2, the rook will have to lose some time to get to the second rank again, and Petrosian succeeds in slightly improving his position.

39 ♔d1 ♖c3 40 ♔d2!

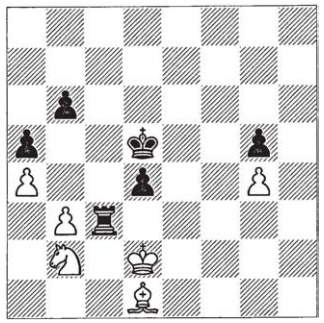
Taking advantage of the fact that the pawn is taboo (see the next variation). Was Tal really hoping for the passive 40 ♘c1?

40...g5

40...♖xb3? is answered by two consecutive double attacks: 41 ♘c5+! bxc5 42 ♗c4+ winning the rook.

41 fxg5 fxg5 42 ♗d1 ♔d5 43 ♘b2! *(D)*

B



A strong move. The black king will be distracted on the queenside in order to defend the b6-pawn, leaving the g5-pawn without any possible protection. The situation is a good illustration of the fact that the knight can make longer steps than the king.

43...♖g3

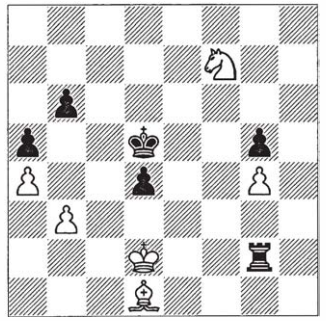
The rook hurries to the second rank again.

44 ♘c4 ♔c5 45 ♘e5 ♔d5

This prophylactic move, placing the e4-square under control, might not really be necessary: after the immediate 45...♖g2+ 46 ♔d3 (the variation 46 ♔c1 ♔b4 would win two tempi for Black compared to the final note) 46...♖g1 47 ♗e2 ♖b1 White faces difficulties coordinating his pieces and defending the pawn weaknesses; for instance: 48 ♔c2 ♖g1 (not 48...♖e1?? because of 49 ♘d3+) 49 ♘f7 ♖g2 50 ♔d2 ♔b4 with counterplay.

46 ♘f7 ♖g2+ 47 ♔d3 ♖g3+ 48 ♔d2 ♖g2+ *(D)*

W



½-½

It is quite frustrating that at this precise moment, when the tension has reached its highest point, the players agreed to a draw. The simplest explanation I found is that the game had been adjourned a few moves ago and both players had time to analyse the position thoroughly. Not having found the slightest chance to win, Petrosian didn't avoid the repetition.

Let's try to discover how play could have continued if he had been more ambitious. 49 ♔c1 and now:

a) 49...♔c5 (the most natural continuation, but not the best, as we shall see) 50 ♘xg5 ♔b4 (Black's counterplay looks slow, but the g-pawn is not a fast runner either) and here:

a1) 51 ♘e6 (this is the less effective route for the knight) 51...♔c3 52 ♘f4 ♖a2 (although there is not too much operating space on the queenside, Black can create strong threats) 53 ♘d5+ ♔d3 (renewing the threat of ...♖a1+, which would win the bishop) 54 ♗f3 ♖a1+! (it is obvious that the bishop has an unstable position, but the direct attempt to take advantage of this with 54...♖f2? fails to the nice 55 ♗g2! and the white pieces not only defend each other in an indirect way, but also severely restrict the black king; it is hard for Black to make a move here, while the g-pawn threatens to run; note that g6 is indirectly defended as well) 55 ♔b2

♖f1 56 ♗g2 ♖g1!. Now the threat of ...♖xg2+ is real and White should probably accept the repetition, since 57 ♗h3? ♔e2 gives Black strong counterplay.

a2) 51 ♘e4 d3 52 g5 ♔a3 (Black makes a waiting move, inviting White to show a plan of improving his position) 53 ♗f3 ♖g1+ 54 ♔d2 ♔xb3 55 ♔xd3 ♔xa4 56 ♔e3 (the king has to support his pieces in order to obstruct the g-file) 56...♔b3 57 ♔f2 (or 57 ♔f4 a4 58 ♘g3 a3 59 g6 ♖c1 and a draw is most likely: Black will give up the rook for the passed pawn, but the a3-pawn will also cost White a bishop) 57...♖xg5 (not really necessary, but probably sufficient; 57...♖c1 also looks playable) 58 ♘xg5 a4 and it seems to me that Black should reach a draw.

However, all these lines were quite complicated and in none of them did White risk losing. Why then didn't Petrosian try to play for a while?

b) Keeping this question in mind, I discovered that after the *CS* recommendation 49...♖f2 avoiding the double attack with ♗f3, Black's counterplay develops much more quickly: 50 ♘xg5 d3 51 ♘f3 ♔e4 52 ♘d2+ ♔d4 and White is in some sort of zugzwang, since he will have to worsen his position with his next move; for instance, 53 ♘c4 ♔c3 54 ♘e3 ♔d4 with a draw.

In the next game, the shock caused by the unexpected sacrifice made such a solid player as Kholmov lose his composure for one moment, and this proved decisive.

W

Kholmov – Tal
USSR Ch (Erevan) 1962

By employing a tricky move-order Kholmov managed to transpose from the King's Indian to a genuine Sicilian Dragon, an opening that Tal never included in his repertoire. White has concentrated his major pieces on the queenside, anticipating any action from Black on this wing.

18 ♘b5

Threatening 19 ♗f1, when 19...♕c6 is met by 20 ♘a7, and 19...♕b4 by 20 c3 ♕b3 21 ♖a3. With this move, Kholmov shows his intention to push Tal back completely. He probably hoped for a static position with a slight advantage. The black minor pieces are nicely placed, but don't produce a very dynamic impression. Unless...

18...♘xe4!?

It is not easy to give a definite assessment to this incredible move. I would have called it slightly dubious if Tal hadn't won the game! Even if careful analysis proves that the move's objective merits are not too high, the psychological factors should confer it at least an '!'. Instead of a calm positional battle, Kholmov faced an irrational situation, where he had to choose on every move between several unclear continuations.

The only problem with Tal's sacrifice is that it wasn't really necessary. The calm 18...♖a8 followed by ...♘d7, with some blockading ideas, seems to hold the position together. White does not get anywhere with a rapid attack; for instance: 19 b3 (after 19 ♗f1 ♕c8 20 ♗b6 ♘d7 the b2-pawn is hanging) 19...♕c8 (better than 19...♕b4 20 ♕xb4 axb4 21 ♗d2, when the black pawn is doomed) 20 ♗b6 ♘d7 21 ♗xa5!? ♗xa1 22 ♖xa1 and now, if afraid of White's compensation, Black can consider 22...♕c5+ 23 ♔h1 ♖xa5!? 24 ♕xa5 ♕xc2 with a complicated position.

19 fxe4 ♗xb2

In the perspective of the material balance rook vs bishop + knight, Black has already won two pawns. However, Black's structure is not very mobile. To get a perfectly viable (maybe even better) position, he should win one of the weak a4-, c2- or e4-pawns. Of course, White will try to prevent this.

20 ♘d4

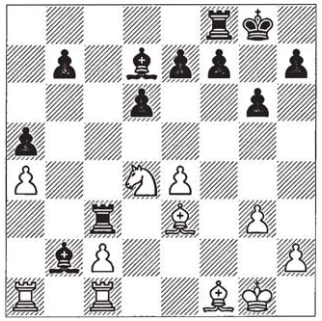
A necessary move, defending the c2- and e4-pawns. Worse is 20 ♗f1 ♕xe4, or 20 c3 ♗xc1 21 ♕xc1 ♗d7, when White cannot defend all the pawns.

20...♗d7 21 ♗f1 ♕c3

Tal tries to keep the position unstable for as long as possible.

22 ♕xc3 ♖xc3 *(D)*

W



23 ♗d2?!

This is an important inaccuracy. Let's consider the alternatives:

a) 23 ♔f2?! f5 gives Black strong counterplay, and is also promising for him.

b) 23 ♗f2?! loses the a-pawn.

c) 23 ♖a2!, as suggested by *CS*, is much stronger. I have tried several ways to get some counterplay for Black, but failed every time. Below is a summary of my efforts.

c1) Against 23...♖xe3 the line and assessment given by *CS* seem to be correct: 24 ♖xb2 ♖xe4 25 c3! ♗xa4 26 ♖xb7. White is better coordinated and the a5-pawn is rather weak. Black must fight for a draw.

c2) 23...♗xc1 24 ♗xc1 and now it seems that Black should be able to win another pawn: after ...♖fc8, ♗d3 he would have ...♖xd3!. Unfortunately, White has a good response no matter what move-order Black chooses:

c21) 24...e5 25 ♘b5 ♗xb5 26 axb5 ♖fc8 27 ♗h6 ♖xc2 (defending the a5-pawn with ...b6 would lead to a very passive position after ♗d3; White would consolidate with c4 and then slowly prepare to open the position on the kingside; for instance, after the predicable ..f6, he would retire the bishop to e3 and advance with h4 and g4-g5) 28 ♖xa5 ♖b8!? (this rook was badly placed on c8, where it could come under attack from the light-squared bishop; therefore, before pushing his f-pawn, Black tries to improve the position of his rook, while defending the b7-pawn; if 28...f6, then 29 ♗h3; or if 28..f5 29 exf5 gxf5, then 30 ♗d3, in both cases with an advantage for White – the bishops dominate the position) 29 ♖a3!? (insisting with 29 ♖a7 makes less sense now; for example: 29...f5 30 ♗d3 ♖c3 31 ♗b1 ♔f7 32 exf5 d5 with an unclear position) and Black has no easy way to free the position of his king; for instance, 29...f6 30 ♖f3 ♔f7 31 ♗g5. In such positions, the long-ranged bishops can fulfil defensive and offensive tasks simultaneously. For instance, the h6-bishop defends the important square c1, while also keeping the black king under pressure.

c22) 24...♖fc8 25 ♗d2! ♖3c4!? (trying to attack the weak white pawns; 25..♖3c5 26 ♗d3 b6 is too passive: White will regroup with ♗e3, c4, ♘b5, ♖b2, ♘c3-d5 and Black is restricted to passive defence) 26 ♗xc4 ♖xc4 27 ♘b5! (once again, this is the best square for the knight – Black is practically forced to exchange it and then the white rook becomes active; 27 ♘b3 ♖xe4 28 ♘xa5 is weaker in view of 28...b6) 27...♗xb5 28 axb5 a4 29 e5! (an important move, weakening the a3-f8 diagonal; the immediate 29 ♗a5 ♖xe4 30 c3, planning ♗b4, allows Black to build up a solid position: 30...g5 31 ♗b4 ♖e5 32 b6 ♖b5 33 ♖xa4 ♖xb6 and, most probably, White cannot win) 29...dxe5 30 ♗a5! f5 31 c3 (threatening ♗b4 and ♖xa4) 31...♖c5 32 ♗b4 ♖xb5 33 ♖xa4 ♔f7 34 ♖a8 h5 35 ♖h8 (Black cannot defend his e7-weakness) 35...♔g7 36 ♖c8! (after 36 ♖e8 ♔f6! the pawn is still taboo) 36...♔f6 37 ♖c7 (now Black has to weaken his dark squares even more) 37...e6 38 ♗e7+ ♔f7 39 ♗g5+ and White has good winning chances due to the bad position of the black king.

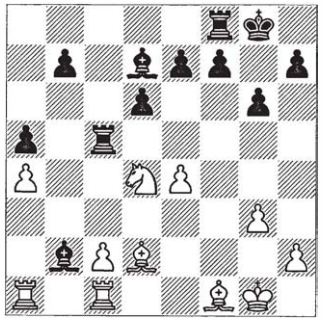
23...♖c5 *(D)*

24 ♘b3

A strange decision. It is impossible to find out whether Kholmov decided to transfer his knight to a1 in order to defend the c2-pawn, without fearing ...e5, or he simply missed Tal's next move.

Anyway, by this point Black has plenty of play. For instance, 24 c3 loses one of the pawns to 24...♗xc1, while 24 ♘b5 ♗xa1 25 ♖xa1 ♖xc2 26 ♗xa5 ♖fc8 also favours Black. He plans ...♖c1, either exchanging one pair of rooks or invading the first rank.

W



24...♗xa1 25 ♘xa1

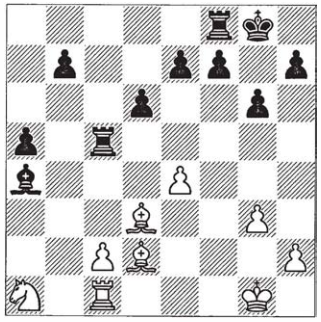
Could Kholmov have missed that 25 ♘xc5? loses to 25...♗d4+! ? Capturing with the rook leaves the knight in an exposed position: 25 ♖xa1 ♖xc2 26 ♗xa5 ♖b2.

25...♗xa4

Black has a big material advantage and the better chances, but the position is still complicated.

26 ♗d3 *(D)*

B



26...♖fc8

This natural move might be not the best one here, since the white c-pawn is well defended.

CS makes an interesting recommendation: 26...♖a8 planning to meet 27 ♖b1 with 27...b5. Black would have a clear advantage without the least risk. In the game, the position becomes double-edged again. Maybe this was what Tal hoped for, after all.

27 ♖b1 d5

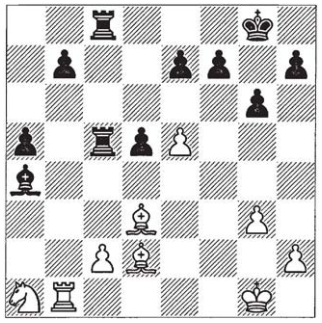
By opening the centre, Tal hopes to get more space for his rooks. Black cannot comfortably defend his pawn; for instance, 27...♖8c7 28 ♗e3 and his rooks are vulnerable.

Comparing with some previous lines, the simplifications with 27...♗xc2 28 ♘xc2 ♖xc2 29 ♗xc2 ♖xc2 should be enough for a draw, but Tal obviously hoped for more.

28 e5!? *(D)*

In his turn, Kholmov tries to keep the position closed, even if this will cost him an important central pawn. Allowing the exchange in the centre would leave his minor pieces exposed; for instance, 28 exd5 ♖xd5 29 ♖xb7 ♗xc2!. Or 28 ♖xb7 dxe4 29 ♗xe4 ♖d8 30 ♗d3 (the only way to defend the first rank) 30...♗xc2!.

B



28...d4 29 ♖xb7

29 ♗f4 allows 29...b5, when the white rook remains passive.

29...♖xe5 30 ♔f2

In order to get some freedom of action for his rook, White needs to get his king away from the first rank.

30...♗c6 31 ♖b6 a4

The white knight now occupies the worst position possible, but Black still needs a few moves to consolidate: his king is rather exposed and the e5-rook stands in the way of its own pawns.

32 ♗a6 ♖c7 33 ♗h6

CS correctly points out that 33 ♗f4 is a better chance. For instance: 33...♖f5 34 ♔e1 (*CS* only mentions 34 ♔g1, but the king seems to belong in the centre) 34...♖xf4 (after 34...e5 35 ♗h6 there is a considerable difference compared to the game: the fifth rank is obstructed by a pawn and 35...f6 loses to 36 ♗c4+ since ...♗d5 is not possible) 35 gxf4 and the position is not easy to assess. I think that we wouldn't risk too much if we say that, with three pawns for a (still passive) knight, Black is better, but White is still in the game. The a4-pawn might fall (for instance, after the exchange of bishops with ♗b5) but the h2-pawn is also exposed to ...♖c3-h3.

33...♖f5+ 34 ♔g1 f6 35 g4

35 ♗c4+ is inoffensive now due to 35...♗d5.

35...♖c5 36 ♗f4 e5

Now that Black has finished consolidating, White is completely lost. Kholmov makes a few more moves in order to adjourn the game.

37 ♗d2 ♗e4 38 ♗b4 ♖5c6 39 ♖b8+ ♔g7 40 ♗b5 ♖c8 41 ♖b7+ ♖6c7 42 ♖b6 ♖b7 0-1

Besides the defending (or indeed counterattacking) purpose of the sacrifice, the previous examples had another thing in common: the tactical operation was completely unmasked, occurring as a simple exchange of pieces. This way, the opponents had no doubt about Tal's intention to sacrifice; the games were played with the cards on the table.

We shall move now to a more complicated category. In the following examples, Tal initiates a tactical operation where, at some point, the opponent has a *zwischenzug* at his disposal, allowing him to 'win' two pieces for the rook. In the heat of the fight, the opponents might have thought that Tal simply miscalculated and the euphoria of having tricked the great magician was a possible reason for further mistakes.

The important thing is that the sacrifices were completely sound. They were not winning, but, in keeping with Steinitz's theories, only transformed a balanced position into another; only the character of the fight was radically changed.

In the following diagram the position is very complex and, probably, equal. White has strong pressure in the centre, but his king's position is weakened. Besides, his rooks are not ideally placed: it would be nice to have the queen's rook on f1 or e1. On the other hand, Black faces difficulties in finding a good square for his queen. With his next move, Tal 'invites' his opponent to create an apparently unpleasant pin of the knight.

16...♖e8 17 ♗g5 ♘g4!?

B

Mititelu – Tal
Varna students Wcht 1958

A remarkable move, which solves all Black's problems mentioned above, and changes the character of the position.

18 fxg4

As Tal pointed out, this was not intended as a queen sacrifice, since the line starting with 18 ♗xd8 was not too difficult to calculate nor to assess: 18...♘f2+ 19 ♔g1 ♘xd1+ 20 ♔h1 (20 ♔f1? ♘e3+ wins the queen back) 20...♘f2+ 21 ♔g1 ♖exd8 with obvious compensation.

18...♕xg5 19 exd5 ♗xg4 20 d6

The threat of playing d7 seems very strong.

20...♗xe2 21 ♘xe2 ♗xd6 22 ♖xd6 ♘b5 *(D)*

W

23 ♕d2!

I don't know what Mititelu thought when he discovered this move during his previous calculations, but if I had been White, I would have been convinced that Tal had overlooked it!

23...♕g4!

23...♕e5? loses to 24 ♖d5!.

24 ♘c3 ♘xd6 25 ♕xd6 ♖cd8

We have reached one of the situations described in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter: the white minor pieces lack communication, because the wings on which they are situated are too far from each other. Besides, the e4- and d5-squares are firmly under control.

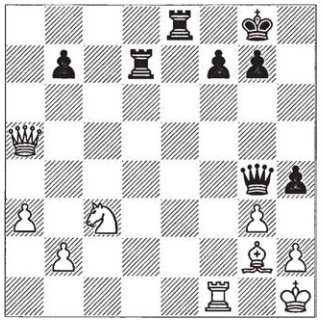
In his autobiographical work *Vi ogoni ataki*, Tal optimistically assessed this position. He writes that an attack against the white king is imminent, as is the penetration by the black rooks on the second rank. However, White has enough resources for defence and counterplay. First of all, he will soon have a considerable material advantage, since the black queenside pawns are weak. Secondly, after the opening of the f-file, the f7-pawn became weak. The desired penetration with both rooks on the second rank is also not possible while the knight is on c3.

26 ♕c7 h5

With all his pieces on ideal positions, Tal needs to include more forces in the attack.

27 ♖f1 ♖d7 28 ♕xa5 h4 *(D)*

W



29 gxh4

It is curious that Tal didn't comment on this move, which in fact marks a first critical moment. White had three(!) different ways of forcing the exchange of queens, thus reducing the attacking potential. *CS* mentions them all, but the lines given are either too short or unconvincing. Let's consider the moves one by one.

a) In a certain way, 29 ♕b4 looks safest: the queens are exchanged without worsening the position of any of the white pieces, thus avoiding immediate unpleasant consequences. The dark side of the move is that the pawn-structure is spoiled; the effects will have a long-term character. 29...♕xb4 (29...♖d4 is met by 30 ♕xb7!) 30 axb4 hxg3 31 hxg3 ♖e3 (Black has to choose with care the squares for his rooks, which are potentially vulnerable to attacks from the white pieces; here is a sample of what Black should avoid: 31...♖d2 32 ♗xb7 ♖xb2 33 b5 and now ...♖e3 is not possible because of the fork on d1, while 33...♖b3 loses to 34 ♗d5! ♖xc3 35 ♗xf7+ ♔f8 36 ♗g6+ ♔e7 37 ♖e1+) 32 ♔h2 (or 32 g4 ♖d4 and Black not only attacks most of White's pawns, but also controls many central squares) 32...♖d2 (Black has reached a point of maximum activity, but he doesn't yet threaten to take on b2; his plan is to improve his position slowly, with ...g6, ...♔g7, ...f5, and eventually ...b6 at some point; White cannot simply sit and watch) 33 ♔h3 ♖dd3 34 ♗xb7 ♖xg3+ 35 ♔h2 ♖g5 (an accurate move, controlling the vital square d5, and threatening ...♖d2xb2 or ...♖d4xb4) 36 ♖f4 ♖d2+ 37 ♔h3 ♖xb2 38 ♗d5 g6 39 ♗xf7+ ♔g7 and the most likely result is a draw. Black intends to play ...♖f5 and, after the practically forced exchange of rooks, to bring his king to the queenside and exchange the rook for the pawn and one of the white minor pieces. The white king will have to spend some time eliminating the g6-pawn.

b) 29 ♕f5 ♕xf5 30 ♖xf5 has the defect of weakening the first rank: 30...♖e1+ 31 ♖f1 (we already know that exchanging one pair of rooks favours Black, but 31 ♗f1 might be risky: 31...hxg3 32 hxg3 ♖d2 33 ♘a4 g6 34 ♖f3 f5 followed by ...♔g7-f6 and Black's initiative looks very dangerous) 31...♖xf1+ 32 ♗xf1 hxg3 33 hxg3 ♖d2 34 ♘a4 g6 (you might have guessed already: Black plans to improve his position gradually with ...♔g7, ...f5 and ...♔f6; White is best advised to undertake something active before it's too late) 35 b4 ♖a2 36 ♘c5 ♖xa3 37 ♘xb7 ♖xg3 38 b5 ♖b3 39 ♘d6 ♔f8 and Black has no problem reaching a draw.

c) 29 ♕a4 ♕xa4 30 ♘xa4 puts the knight on the edge of the board. After, for instance, 30...hxg3 31 hxg3 ♖e2 we would reach a similar pattern.

I am not sure whether Mititelu avoided the endgame because he was playing for a win. The truth is that the position (either with or without queens) is very difficult to understand. White might have simply been afraid that the endgame was worse for him.

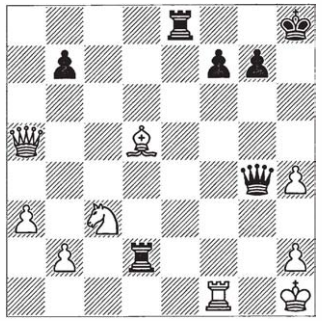
29...♖d2 30 ♗d5

There is no time for 30 ♗xb7 because of 30...♕h3, winning. White has to create some threats. The situation is not too common: although they castled on the same side, both kings are under fire.

30...♔h8 *(D)*

A good prophylactic move, preparing to continue the attack. Black also has a nice way to force a draw by repetition: 30...♕f4!? 31 ♗g2 ♕g4. Tal doesn't mention it, but he was probably not at all interested in a draw.

W



31 ♕b4

Or:

a) *CS* mentions 31 ♖g1?? and gives a long variation, containing an additional mistake by White and ending in mate. In fact, Black mates in two after the simple 31...♕xg1+ 32 ♔xg1 ♖e1#.

b) 31 ♕c7 leaves Black with plenty of play after 31...♖xd5 (31...♕h3?, suggested by *CS*, loses after the spectacular 32 ♖g1! ♖xd5 33 ♕xf7!, when the poor coordination of the black pieces is striking) 32 ♘xd5 ♕e4+.

c) *CS* also suggests 31 ♗xb7 which in fact might be the best move (although not winning, as they seem to claim), removing the bishop from the attacked square and grabbing another pawn. Black has a relatively simple draw with 31...♖xh2+ (neither 31...♕xh4 32 ♕c7, nor 31...♕h3 32 ♕h5+ is good, as *CS* indicates) 32 ♔xh2 ♕xh4+ 33 ♔g1 ♕d4+! and the king cannot escape the perpetual check. The white pieces are too far from each other.

31...♕h3 32 ♕f4 ♖xh2+ 33 ♔g1

The only move. 33 ♕xh2? allows mate by 33...♕xf1+ 34 ♕g1 ♕h3+ 35 ♕h2 ♖e1#.

33...♖c2! *(D)*

W

As Tal pointed out, this is much stronger than capturing the unimportant b2-pawn, which would lead to a loss of time after the retreat of the knight to d1.

34 ♘d1?

CS correctly considers this the decisive mistake. They give 34 ♗f3 which somehow keeps White's position together; for instance: 34...♖e3 (34...♖e6 would now be answered by 35 ♘e4 which, compared to the game, doesn't interfere with the bishop's diagonal) 35 ♘e4 ♖xf3 36 ♕b8+ ♖c8 37 ♖xf3 ♕g4+ 38 ♕g3 ♕xe4. In spite of the massive simplifications and material equality, Black keeps a more pleasant position in view of the exposed position of the white king.

Mititelu might have been in time-trouble here; he had probably expected 33...♖xb2 and planned 34 ♘d1; facing another move, he reacted 'as planned'. Besides, it is not easy to make retreating moves such as 34 ♗f3 in time-trouble.

34...♖e6!

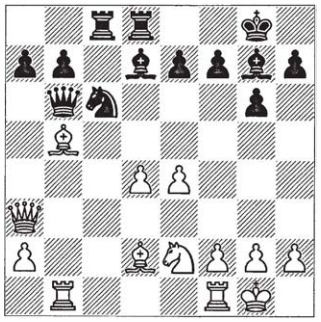
Taking advantage of the fact that the bishop has to guard the g2-square, the rook-lift is decisive.

35 h5

Preventing only one of the threats on the sixth rank.

35...♖f6 36 ♕b8+ ♖c8 37 ♗g2 ♖xf1+ 0-1

B



Gulko – Tal
Sochi 1970

White seems to have strong pressure on the queenside. The opposition of the rook and queen on the b-file looks embarrassing for Black. And yet, at a closer look, we can note (as Tal did during the game) that Black is better developed and coordinated: all his pieces have attacking positions. As a consequence, Black can bravely embark upon a tactical operation:

17...♗xd4! 18 ♗xc6

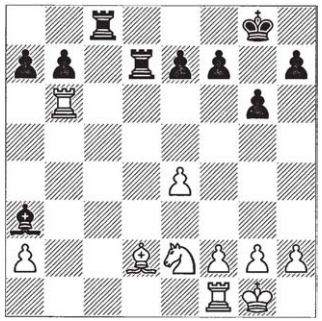
The obvious reaction.

18...♗c5!

As Tal indicated, the tempting 18...♗xf2+ leads to an advantage for White: 19 ♔h1 ♕xc6 20 ♖xf2 ♕xe4 21 ♖e1 with chances for a kingside attack.

19 ♖xb6 ♗xa3 20 ♗xd7 ♖xd7 *(D)*

W



21 ♗b4

Just like Mititelu, Gulko must have been very happy when finding this *zwischenzug*. Tal suggested 21 ♖b3 as a better practical chance, giving 21...♖xd2 22 ♖xa3 ♖xe2 23 ♖xa7, but this line also seems unpleasant for White: after 23...♖c7 White is rather passive (he has to keep the rook on f1 and the pawn on f2 to avoid disaster on the second rank) while Black can slowly improve his position (...♔g7, ...g5, etc.).

21...axb6 22 ♗xa3 ♖c4!

A strong move, keeping under control the squares c3 and d4, where the knight would dream to reach. After the hurried 22...♖a8?! 23 ♗c1 ♖xa2 White improves his position with 24 ♘c3 planning ♘d5.

23 ♘g3

CS recommends 23 ♗c1 ♖xe4 24 ♗e3, when White has managed to coordinate his pieces. However, even in this case 24...♖a4 25 ♘c1 enables Black to keep the material advantage and a better position.

23...♖a4!

Once the knight was driven away from the important d5-square, Black can quietly take the a-pawn.

24 ♗c1 ♖xa2 25 ♗e3 ♖b2!

After this precise move, the b-pawn is unstoppable.

26 ♖c1 b5 27 ♔f1 b4 28 ♔e1 b3 29 ♖c3 h5

Black threatens to win by playing 30...h4 31 ♘f1 ♖b1+ 32 ♔e2 ♖xf1 33 ♔xf1 b2 34 ♖b3 ♖d1+.

30 e5

Gulko obviously wanted to bring his knight into play, but he also leaves the d5-square to the enemy rook. After 30 h4 Black would at least manage to avoid problems after an eventual ...♗h6 without any loss of tempo.

30...♖d5 31 ♘e4 ♖b5

With such strong support, it is clear that the b-pawn will promote very soon.

32 e6

There is not much White can do in this position. Tal gives an interesting variation in which White's attempt to get counterplay against the black king fails by a hair's breadth: 32 ♖c8+ ♔g7 33 ♗d4 ♖c2 (he also mentions 33...♖b1+!? 34 ♔d2 ♖d5) 34 e6+ f6 35 ♖e8 b2 36 ♖xe7+ ♔h6 37 ♗xb2 ♖bxb2 38 ♔d1 f5 39 ♖f7 fxe4 40 e7 (has White managed to escape with a draw?) 40...e3! 41 fxe3 ♖xg2 42 ♔c1 ♖be2 (no, not really).

32...♖b1+ 33 ♔d2 b2 34 ♗d4 ♖d1+ 0-1

14 Simplification

The game of chess resembles in many respects a voyage on a ship. We slowly leave the peaceful harbour of the initial position and float for a while along the familiar streams of opening theory. Soon we are left on our own, surrounded by the choppy and usually unknown waters of the middlegame. It can happen that our trip doesn't take the course we hoped for and that we are caught in the middle of a powerful storm. We abandon the thought of reaching the main destination; we are more concerned about reaching any harbour as soon as possible, however good or bad it may be.

Returning to chess terminology, this would be equivalent to simplifying the position to a worse, but possibly tenable ending, in order to avoid worse damage in a bad middlegame.

The sailor is happy to feel the ground under his feet again: it doesn't matter so much whether the shore is unfriendly. In chess, theory is better developed in the opening and in the endgame than in complex middlegames. Reaching familiar territory can help us survive the storm.

There are certain endgames with a distinct drawish tendency, even in the case of a modest material imbalance. The most important of them are rook endings, those with opposite-coloured bishops and several of those with pawns on the same wing.

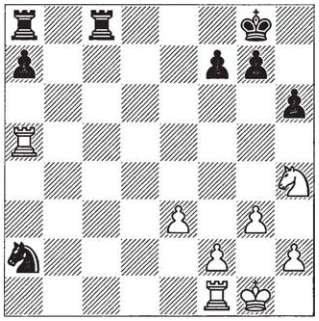
This chapter is closely related to the next one (Defending Difficult Endings). Once on a desert island, you have to do your best to avoid starving.

We shall start by looking at some games where a pawn-down rook ending was the safest option for the defending side (*see next diagram*).

In spite of the simplifications and material equality, White has slightly the better chances. Black's a-pawn is not a serious candidate for promotion as yet, and indeed is more of a weakness.

The configuration on the other wing also favours White. However, it is a question of time whether Black will manage to arrange his pawns

B



Korchnoi – Karpov
Merano Wch (5) 1981

on g6 and h5, before being blocked with h4-h5 and/or g4. If White managed to win the a-pawn, without exchanging knights, the resulting endgame would offer him excellent winning prospects, irrespective of the kingside structure.

However, if Black managed to play ...h5 and ...g6, he could safely give up the a-pawn in order to exchange the knights and a pair of rooks.

21...♘c1!

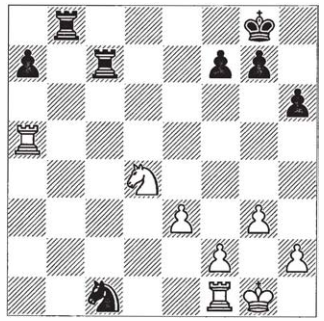
Unlike its white counterpart, this knight has no stable squares at its disposal. The best thing it can do for the moment is to prevent the activation of White's king's rook.

22 ♘f5 ♖c7 23 ♘d4

Of course, it is hard to choose between such nice squares as f5 and d4. The concrete aim of the previous move was to prevent the black knight from unblocking the a-pawn, starting with ...♘b3, etc.

23...♖b8 *(D)*

Black has things to do on both wings, and Karpov prefers to activate the rook as soon as possible, but 23...g6 also comes into consideration; for instance, 24 ♖a1 ♘d3 25 ♖fd1 ♘e5 26 ♖a6 and Black is just in time to get his rook off its passive position with 26...♖b8.



24 ♖a1?!

There was no need as yet to retreat the rook from its dominant position. Korchnoi misses his chance to make progress on the kingside with 24 h4, when Black's road to equality is more complicated:

a) 24...♘b3 25 ♘xb3 ♖xb3 26 h5 (after this move, it is dangerous for Black to lose the a-pawn) and then:

a1) 26...♖b2 fails to keep the white rooks passive; for instance: 27 ♖fa1 ♖cc2 28 ♖f5 ♖a2 29 ♖b1 ♖ab2 30 ♖xb2 ♖xb2 31 ♖a5 ♖b7 32 ♔g2 transposes to line 'a2'.

a2) 26...♖cb7 27 ♔g2 ♖3b5 28 ♖fa1 ♖xa5 29 ♖xa5. Black has managed to simplify the position even more, avoiding a possible combined attack by the rooks. However, his defensive task is far from easy. For instance, the attempt to transfer the king to the queenside in order to support the pawn is not without risk: 29...♔f8 30 g4 ♔e7 31 ♔g3 ♔d7 32 g5! and the king has to return, having allowed the creation of a weakness on h6.

b) 24...♖b2 (the counterattack against f2 is rather slow) 25 ♔g2 (preventing 25...♖a2 because of 26 ♖xc1!) 25...♘d3 26 h5 ♖d2 27 g4 ♖b7 28 ♔g3 ♖bb2 29 f4 ♖g2+ 30 ♔f3 ♖h2 (threatening ...♖h3 followed by ...♘f2 and ...♖xe3) 31 ♘f5 and White has safely defended all his pawns and is ready to start an attack against the black king.

24...♘d3

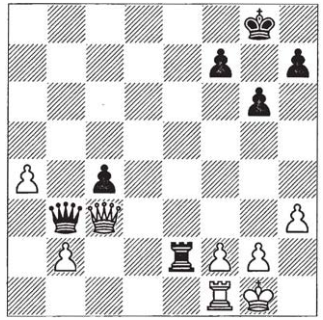
Karpov could have immediately reached the drawish rook ending by playing 24...♘b3; for instance, 25 ♖fb1 ♖cb7 26 ♘xb3 ♖xb3 27 ♖xb3 ♖xb3 28 ♖xa7 h5. His move is not bad either, because White is not too active yet.

25 ♖fd1 ♘e5 26 ♖a2 g6 27 ♖da1 ♖bb7 28 h3 h5 29 ♔g2 ♔g7 30 ♖a5 ♘c6!

This is the safest pathway to a draw. Moving the knight to some other square would allow White slowly to improve his kingside position (g4-g5, f4, etc.) when Black starts to be confronted with unexpected problems.

31 ♘xc6 ♖xc6 32 ♖xa7 ♖xa7 33 ♖xa7

Those were still the years of the Cold War, which might explain why Korchnoi continued playing this position for 35 more moves.



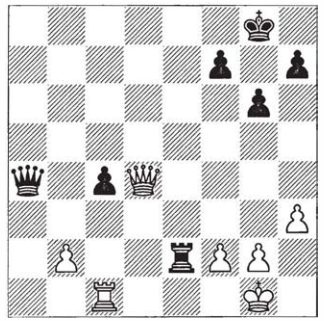
Piket – Topalov
Monte Carlo Amber blindfold 2000

It is not entirely unusual for modern games to produce opening novelties deep in the endgame. The position was considered to be drawish, but White's next move put Black in an unpleasant psychological situation.

31 ♖c1! ♕xa4?

Judging from the later course of the game, this should have been the decisive mistake. Topalov's desire to re-establish material equality is understandable. Although the consequences of his move were hard to calculate (especially in a blindfold game), it is clear that the exposed position of the black king as well as the slightly poor coordination of the black pieces make his position extremely dangerous. He had a much safer choice, that of simplifying to a rook endgame with 31...♕xc3 32 ♖xc3 ♖xb2 33 ♖xc4. You can find more general explanations, of both a technical and a psychological nature, about this kind of position in the notes to the game Leko-Anand, Linares 2003 (Chapter 15, Defending Difficult Endings). From a practical point of view, the best move is now 33...h5 (33...♖a2 34 g4 g5 could also be drawish, but it is less analysed than the position with the pawns blocked on h4 and h5; therefore, playing such a position without necessity would involve an important dose of risk) 34 a5 (for 34 h4 see again Leko-Anand) 34...♖a2 35 ♖c5 and now Black is just in time to play 35...h4 when White would have no convenient way to activate his king, due to the weakness of his pawns.

32 ♕d4! *(D)*



Positions with queens and rooks often have a middlegame character, especially if one of the kings has insufficient defence.

32...♕a6

Stohl also analyses 32...♖c2 33 ♖e1 ♕b5 34 ♕d8+ ♔g7 35 ♖e8 with a strong attack; for instance, 35...♖xb2 36 ♖g8+ ♔h6 37 ♕f8+ ♔g5 38 ♕e7+ ♔h6 39 g4! and the threat of ♕h4+ is decisive.

33 ♖xc4 ♖xb2 34 ♕d8+ ♔g7 35 ♖c8 ♖b1+ 36 ♔h2 ♕e6

Now, as Stohl indicated, White could have won with 37 ♕f8+! ♔f6 38 ♕h8+ ♔g5 (or 38...♔f5 39 ♖c5+ ♔e4 40 f3+ ♔e3 41 ♖e5+ winning the queen) 39 ♖c5+ f5 (39...♔h6 allows mate in one: 40 ♕f8#) 40 ♕d8+ ♔h6 (40...♔h5 is no better in view of 41 g4+) 41 ♕h4+ ♔g7 42 ♖c7+ with a decisive attack.

Extensive simplifications should be carried out with great care, because they usually involve long forced variations with the consequent risk of miscalculation. From the point of view of the theme studied in this chapter, the next game contains two important phases: a premature attempt to simplify, ending in a total fiasco (moves 22 to 26) and a more successful plan of reaching a drawish rook ending. I have also highlighted some psychological aspects of the fight against a slightly unusual opponent.

Marin – *Goliath Blitz*
Cullera 2002

A few months before the start of the open in Cullera (Valencia, Spain) all the invited players received e-mails inquiring whether they would mind the participation of a computer. Most of my colleagues might have thought, just like me, that it would make no real difference: just another strong player in the tournament, which, besides, wouldn't get a money prize.

When the tournament itself started, things became a bit alarming: the computer won its first four games! 'Well', I egoistically said to myself, 'after all, the machine is just doing my job, beating one after another my possible rivals'; being separated on the initial list by two numbers, our colours didn't fit together and I was not afraid of a direct combat. Only if...

Only if I didn't have to meet 'the guy' in the last round, when colours lose their importance when the pairing is made. Fate was a bit cruel, but rather fair in this case: I got punished for my thoughts and was paired with Goliath precisely in the last round. I had the white pieces; with any reasonable human opponent, I would have tried to get an advantage from the opening and, in case of failure, made a short draw, finishing in one of the first three places, but how can you offer a draw to a machine?

22 ♘c5?

An overly direct attempt to simplify the position. 22 ♗xd5? ♗xd5 23 ♕xd5 is obviously good for Black in view of 23...♖d8 24 ♕e5 ♖e6 25 ♕f4 ♖e4 winning back the pawn with a clear dominance of the a7-bishop over the a4-knight. However, the simple 22 ♘c3 maintains equality.

22...♗xc5 23 dxc5 ♖xc5

In fact, it seems that 23...♖d8 also preserves a slightly better position for Black, but it will soon become clear why the computer preferred the continuation in the game.

24 ♗xd5 ♖b5

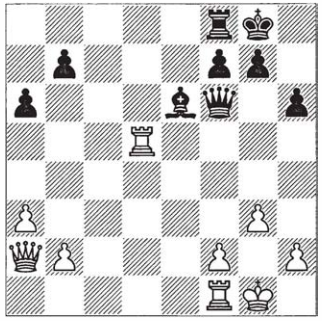
If I had listened to my intuition, I would have given up considering 22 ♘c5 from the moment I discovered this *zwischenzug*.

25 ♕a2 ♖xd5

This move was not unexpected; the surprise was to come on the next move. I had also calculated 25...♗xd5 26 ♖xd5 ♕e6 27 ♖fd1 ♖e8 28 b4 with a drawish position.

26 ♖xd5 ♕f6! *(D)*

W



When I saw this move, it took me barely a few seconds to understand the cruel reality: I was going to lose a pawn without any serious compensation! I was lucky, however, that during the previous phases of the game I got some sort of training in computer-like thinking and I am especially proud of some of my later moves, starting with the next one.

27 ♖e1!

White's problem is that 27 ♖fd1? loses to 27...♕f3 with two terrible threats: ...♕xd1+ and ...♗h3. The text-move forces Black to take at once on d5 (because of the threat of ♖xe6, solving all the problems) and prepares to activate the rook.

27...♗xd5 28 ♕xd5 ♕xb2 29 ♖e3

In spite of his 'clear' extra pawn, Black has serious technical problems in converting the advantage into victory, since the f7-pawn is under pressure and the rook cannot easily be brought into play. Besides, the exchange of queens would in most cases lead to an endgame with drawish tendencies (the only thing that I had to avoid was an endgame with a passed pawn supported by the rook from behind; this was one of the reasons I refrained from playing a4).

29...♕c1+ 30 ♔g2 ♕c7

A good regrouping. Black defends both his weaknesses (b7 and f7) and prepares to bring the rook into play.

31 ♖d3 b5

I expected 31...♖e8 32 ♕d7 ♕xd7 33 ♖xd7 b5 34 ♖a7 ♖e6 leading to an endgame that is not easy to assess. In order to make some progress, Black should post his rook on f6 and then march his king to b8. Meanwhile, White has to generate some counterplay on the kingside, trying to destabilize the position of the rook. However, this has to be done with care. In certain cases, with the king on the third rank, playing f4 and g4 too early would lead to trouble after ...♖c6, threatening ...♖c3+ or if ♔e4 then ...♖c4+ and ...♖a4.

The endgame probably deserves more detailed analysis. However, I shall just mention that I was a bit disoriented by the computer's decision to keep the queens on: it felt a bit like the machine had started to come to life, to understand and even generate certain human thoughts.

32 ♕d7 ♕c2

The feeling became even stronger now and, little by little, I lost all my remaining optimism.

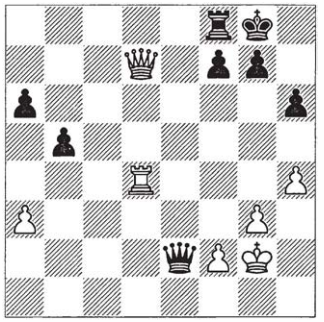
33 h4 ♕c4 34 ♖d4

The move h5 would have created just another weakness, so I decided to refrain from this move. Since the computer hadn't yet shown a clear plan to improve its position, I decided to make some harassing moves.

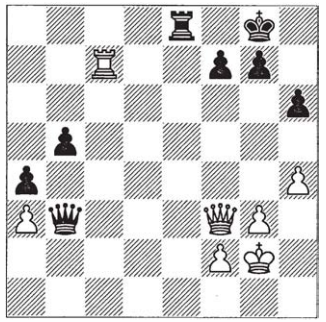
34...♕c3 35 ♖d3 ♕c2 36 ♖d4 ♕b2 37 ♖d3 ♕e2 38 ♖d4 *(D)*

I imagine that for a neutral spectator these last few moves didn't present anything interesting,

B



B



but for me, this phase of the game was really exhausting: I had to watch all my steps carefully, so as not to allow some unexpected progress by Black.

38...a5

Again, this looks very 'human'. If you hadn't known who my opponent was, you might have thought: "Well, Black (most probably a GM from the old Soviet school) knew this was not going to be an easy win. He makes a series of neutral moves before every new pawn advance, in order to make the opponent tired." This is a rather good description, but in our case the explanation is probably different. The computer cannot really generate a plan; not in the human sense, which supposes a certain degree of premeditation of the further moves. The machine simply makes what it considers to be 'the best move'. After moving the queen around, Goliath understood that going on like this we would reach after a finite number of moves a draw by repetition. Therefore, what was considered two moves ago to be the best move was suddenly discarded now and it was the moment to play the 'second-best' one.

39 ♕c7 a4 40 ♕b7 ♖e8

The b5-pawn is much easier to defend than his colleague from a6 and now Black can finally bring his rook out.

41 ♖d7 ♕c4 42 ♖c7

Driving away the black queen from its ideal square.

42...♕b3 43 ♕f3 *(D)*

43...♕xf3+

Unbelievable! Suddenly I was allowed to relax, in the knowledge that nothing bad can happen any more. By this moment I was already very tired. I don't know what would have happened if Goliath had avoided the exchange of queens for a while longer.

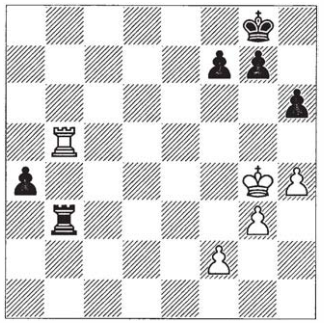
Objectively speaking, White should be able to defend; for instance, 43...b4 44 axb4 ♖b8 45 b5!, or 43...♕e6 44 ♕b7 and Black probably has to return to b3.

44 ♔xf3 ♖e1 45 ♖b7 ♖a1

Black shouldn't have hurried with this exchange of pawns, but Goliath was probably happy about the prospect of pushing its pawn a few squares further, which usually means more points in the system of evaluating the position. 45...♖b1 creates more practical problems.

46 ♖xb5 ♖xa3+ 47 ♔g4 ♖b3 *(D)*

W



If White were allowed to play ♖a5 with the black rook in front of the pawn, we would reach a theoretical drawish position, where, however, the side with an extra pawn has scored incredibly well in practice. The computer didn't know this, of course, but for some reason it preferred to place its rook laterally. Even if this didn't

change anything in our game, it certainly is another alarming syndrome of 'human understanding'.

48 ♖a5 a3 49 h5 g6 50 hxg6 fxg6 51 f4 ♔f8 52 ♖a6

Goliath was still very optimistic and assessed the position as '+2' for Black. When the organizers came and suggested to the young boy operating the computer to offer a draw, I was afraid for a moment that Goliath would protest violently: to such a degree had I been impressed by some human-like acting of the machine...

½-½

Throughout his whole carrier, Anatoly Karpov has obtained many brilliant wins in what seemed to be completely drawish endings with opposite-coloured bishops. However, he has also proved that he knows equally well the other side of the coin.

B

Korchnoi – Karpov
Merano Wch (15) 1981

White is slightly better. Black will be practically forced to play ...c6 at some point, to avoid being left with a backward pawn, but then the light-squared bishop will become very strong.

12...♕d7

The immediate 12...c6, keeping the attack against h3 in reserve, would have avoided Korchnoi's 'combination' on the 16th move, because of the hanging f3-bishop. Since this is not, however, White's best chance for an advantage, we can suppose that Karpov chose this move-order on purpose, using the e5-pawn as bait.

13 ♗g2 c6 14 dxc6 ♘xc6 15 ♗b2 d5

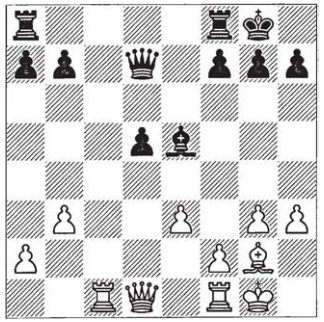
Black has to occupy the centre as soon as possible. After, for instance, 15...♗b6 White would get strong pressure with 16 f4.

16 ♗xe5?!

Korchnoi couldn't resist the temptation. More chances for a long-term advantage are offered by 16 ♖c1!? ♗b6 17 b4 d4 18 ♕b3 with strong pressure on the light squares and the more flexible pawn-structure.

16...♘xe5 17 d4 ♗d6 18 dxe5 ♗xe5 19 ♖c1 *(D)*

B



19...d4!

It is essential to isolate White's centre pawn; later, this pawn will be forced to advance to d5, blocking the bishop. After 19...♖ad8?! 20 ♖c5 White wins the pawn in a more favourable way.

20 ♖c5 ♗f6 21 ♖d5

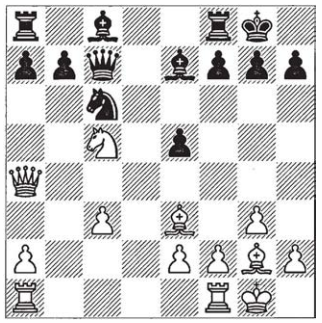
Annotating the game for *Informator*, Korchnoi recommends the immediate 21 exd4. The idea behind this move seems to be to avoid, by tactical means, pushing the pawn and eventually trade it for the b7-pawn. In his collection of games and politicized stories *Na Shakhmatnom Olimpe*, Karpov shows the right way to answer: 21...♖ad8 (Korchnoi only considers 21...♖ac8) 22 ♕c2 ♗xd4 23 ♖c7 ♕d6, when the threat of ...♕xg3 wins an important tempo for Black.

21...♕c7 22 exd4 ♖ad8 23 ♕c1 ♕b6 24 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 25 d5 g6

The rest is rather easy for Black.

26 ♗f3 ♔g7 27 ♖e1 ♖d7 28 ♕f4 ♖e7 29 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 30 ♔g2 a5 31 h4 h5 32 ♗e2 ♗c5 33 ♗c4 ♕f6 34 ♕d2 b6 35 a4 ♕e5 36 ♕d3 ♕f6 37 ♕d2 ♕e5 38 ♗e2 ♕e4+ 39 ♗f3 ♕e5 40 ♗d1 ♕e4+ 41 f3 ½-½

B



Kasparov – Karpov
Moscow Wch (26) 1984/5

White has a slight advantage in development and strong pressure against the black queenside. However, Black has a solid structure and his knight covers several important squares. In order to continue developing, Black has to eliminate the active white knight.

14...♗xc5 15 ♗xc5 ♖d8 16 ♖fd1 ♗e6 17 h3

This move is necessary at this stage to avoid back-rank problems in case of exchanging all the rooks on the d-file. Ironically, it will be precisely this slight weakness that limits White's winning chances in the endgame. 17 ♖d3 is not too effective because of 17...♖xd3 18 exd3 ♖d8 followed by ...♗d5.

17...♖xd1+

This general simplification solves all Black's problems. He does not have enough coordination to fight for the c4-square; for instance, 17...♘a5?! 18 ♕b4!? ♘c4?! 19 ♗xb7 ♖xd1+ 20 ♖xd1 ♖b8 21 ♗xa7 as indicated by Taimanov. It makes little sense to remove the a-pawn from the attacked position with 17...a6 since this weakens the dark squares. After 18 ♕a3 (planning ♗d6) 18...♖xd1+ 19 ♖xd1 ♖d8 20 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 21 ♕b2 White maintains pressure.

18 ♖xd1 ♖d8! 19 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 20 ♗xa7

20 ♗xc6 bxc6 21 ♕xc6 is similar.

20...♕a8

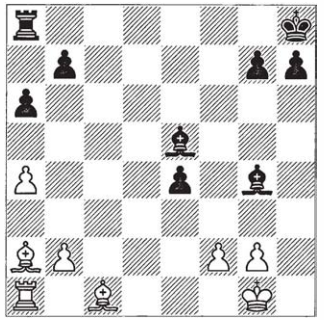
Before simplifying to an opposite-coloured bishop endgame, White forced the black queen to occupy a passive square, but this is only a temporary achievement.

21 ♗xc6 bxc6 22 ♔h2 h5 23 ♕a5 f6 ½-½

Black obtains good play on the light squares after 24 a4 ♕c8 25 h4 ♗c4.

It is generally easier to defend in positions where all the pawns are on the same wing. In the following game, White managed to exchange all the queenside pawns and reach a draw from what looked for a while to be a hopeless position.

W



Marin – Kharlov
Batumi Ech 2002

Things have gone horribly for White so far. He is a clear pawn down and has a passive position. In order to put up a fight, he must finish his development.

34 ♗e3 ♖d8 35 ♖b1

The rook has to go to this passive square, since after 35 ♖c1 ♗xb2 36 ♖b1 ♗e5 the move 37 ♖xb7?? is impossible in view of 37...♖d1#. White has achieved some stability and is in no immediate danger of losing. However, Black has a slow plan of improving his position on the kingside, which could eventually lead to a mating attack. The queenside weaknesses complicate White's defence.

35...h6?!

This is the kind of move any schoolboy from the former Soviet Union would play without hesitation in a situation where the opponent has no counterplay nor possibilities of improving his position. But is this really our case?

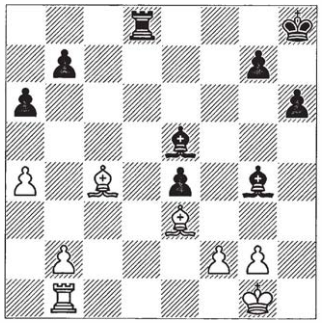
Not really, as we shall see. If Kharlov had anticipated my plan, he would have considered more seriously exchanging his active rook for my seemingly passive one: 35...♖d1+ 36 ♖xd1

♗xd1. Several pawns are hanging now, but White cannot achieve a favourable configuration: 37 ♗d5 (37 a5 ♗xb2 38 ♗d5 ♗c2 39 ♗xb7 ♗d3 is very much similar to the main line) 37...♗xa4 38 ♗xb7 ♗b5 39 b4 ♗d3 40 ♗c5. All this has been more or less forced. White has managed to stabilize the position for a while, but the black king, unlike its white counterpart, threatens to approach the queenside, putting the b4-pawn under serious danger. White could try to build a barrier such as ♗c5 and ♗c6 or ♗c5 and ♗d5, but this should hardly be a reliable defence. The king would obtain support from the dark-squared bishop, which is not restricted in its actions by any pawn weaknesses, and would most likely break through. Kharlov was probably not entirely sure about this ending and preferred first to bring his king a bit closer.

By the way, 35...♗e2!?, placing the f1-a6 diagonal under control, is also interesting.

36 ♗c4 *(D)*

I had by now found the plan of exchanging all the queenside pawns, based on a5, ♗c4, b4-b5, etc. However, choosing the right move-order was not easy. I knew that I had to reckon with two main threats: ...♗e2 and ...♖d1+. Since the immediate 36 a5 is too direct an invitation for Black to play 36...♗e2 preventing my whole plan, I decided to mask my intentions for one more move.



36...♔h7

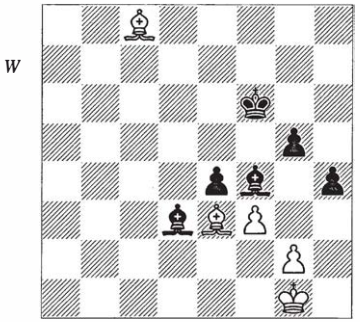
Kharlov didn't suspect anything yet. For the sake of truth it should be mentioned that the consequences of 36...♖d1+ 37 ♖xd1 ♗xd1 are less clear than on the previous move. White could play 38 b3!? threatening a5 and ♗d5, winning the b7- and e4-pawns in exchange for the b3-pawn. Black's only way to prevent this is 38...♗c3! 39 ♗b6 a5 but now the resulting configuration is better for White than in a previous note: 40 ♗d5 g5 41 ♗xb7 ♗xb3 42 ♗c6 ♔g7 43 ♗d8! ♔f7 44 ♗d7. White has set up an effective barrier. Neither of the black bishops is completely free in its actions, which makes it rather difficult for the king to break the blockade. For instance: 44...♗e6 (44...♗d2 should be answered by 45 ♔h2 preventing ...e3; White is in no danger of zugzwang because of the possible ♔h1-h2, etc.; 44...♗e1 doesn't create a zugzwang either: 45 ♔f1!) 45 ♗c6! ♗f5 (Black will make some progress with his king, but the bishop has been forced into a passive position) 46 ♔f1 ♔e6 47 ♗c7 (a second barrier is set up now, which proves even more difficult to break down) 47...♗g6 48 ♔e2 ♔f5 49 ♗d7+!.

37 a5 ♔g6

Judging from his reactions, I think that my opponent finally understood my idea. However, it was too late to change the course of the game. Simplifications are hard to avoid now.

38 b4 h5 39 b5 axb5 40 ♗xb5 h4 41 a6 bxa6 42 ♗xa6 ♔f5 43 ♗b7 ♗e2 44 ♖e1 ♗d3 45 ♖c1 g5 46 ♗c8+ ♔f6 47 ♖c6+ ♖d6 48 ♖xd6+ ♗xd6 49 f3! ♗f4 *(D)*

After 49...exf3 50 gxf3 the white pawn would be defended by the bishop. Even if this pawn falls, White could sacrifice his other bishop for the g5-pawn, since the colour of the h1-square would guarantee a draw.

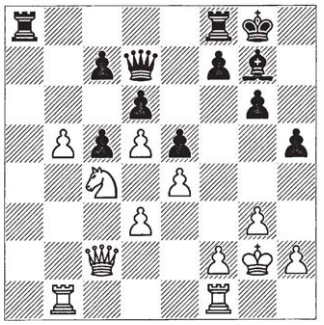


50 ♗xf4 gxf4 51 fxe4 ♗xe4 52 ♔f2 ♔g5 53 ♗d7 ♗f5

There is nothing Black can do except offer a draw.

½-½

The game Marin-Goliath was a first signal that simplification is a weapon that has to be handled with care. The next examples show that not all exchanges are favourable for the defender.



Hodgson – Yusupov
Tilburg 1993

The pawn-structure favours White, who also has a magnificent knight against a passive, potentially bad, bishop. Black has to play very carefully.

23 b6 ♖fb8

Maintaining control of the open lines on the queenside is very important.

24 ♖b2 ♖b7 25 ♖fb1 ♗f8

For the moment, this is the best job available to the bishop: to defend Black's only weakness.

26 bxc7 ♖xb2 27 ♕xb2 ♕xc7 28 ♕b6 ♕e7

Black should avoid the exchange of queens. In the endgame, the rook is not mobile enough to create significant counterplay and Black would be doomed to passivity. This would give White the possibility of slowly strengthening the pressure and improving the position of his king.

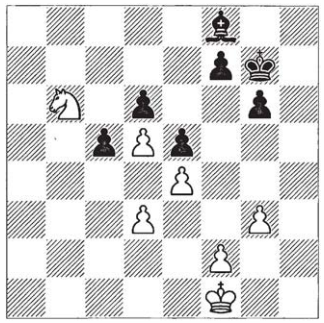
29 ♕b7 ♕d8 30 ♖b6 ♖a2

The threat of ...♕f6 forces White to take preventive measures.

31 ♖a6 ♖xa6

On the other hand, the endgame with queens seems to be defensible, since perpetual check is always a possibility if White tries to improve his king's position. It is risky to keep the rook on the second rank; for instance, 31...♖c2 32 ♕b3!; or 31...♖e2 32 ♔f1! ♖c2 33 ♕b3 ♖c1+ 34 ♔g2 threatening ♕b6 or ♕b2.

32 ♕xa6 h4 33 ♕c6 hxg3 34 hxg3 ♗e7 35 ♕b7 ♗f8 36 ♔f1 ♕g5 37 ♕b8 ♕e7 38 ♕c8 ♔g7 39 ♕b8 ♕d7 40 ♔g2 ♗e7 41 ♕a8 ♗f8 42 ♕c6 ♕d8 43 ♔f1 ♕b8 44 ♕b6 ♕xb6 45 ♘xb6 *(D)*

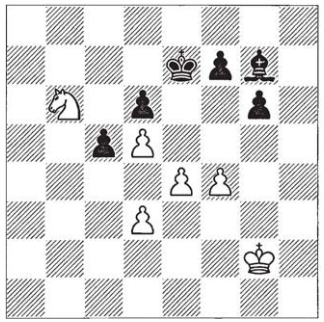


It must have been frustrating for White to find out that such an endgame doesn't offer too many winning chances.

45...♔f6 46 ♔g2

If White managed to bring his king to b5, he would have good winning chances, but there is no time for that: 46 ♔e2 ♔e7 47 ♔d2 ♔d8 48 ♔c2 ♔c7 49 ♘c4 ♔b7 50 ♔b3 ♔a6 51 ♔a4 ♗e7. Besides, instead of passively bringing his king to the queenside, Black might consider creating counterplay on the kingside.

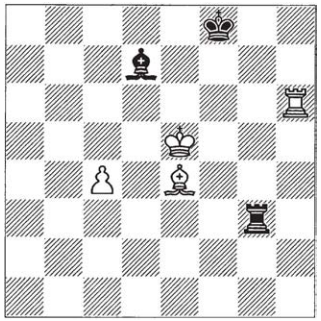
46...♔e7 47 f4 exf4 48 gxf4 ♗g7 *(D)*



49 ♔f3 ♗d4 50 ♔g4 f6

And now it is the prospect of a black passed pawn on the g-file that prevents the white king from marching to b5.

51 ♘c4 ♔d7 52 ♘d2 ♔e7 53 ♘f3 ♗c3 54 ♔g3 ♔f7 55 ♔f2 ♗b2 56 ♘h4 ♗c1 57 ♘g2 ♗b2 58 ♔e2 ♗d4 59 ♘h4 ♗c3 60 ♘f3 ♔g7 61 ♘h2 ♗b2 62 ♔d2 ♗d4 63 ♔e2 ♗b2 64 ♔f3 ♔f7 65 ♘f1 ♗c1 66 ♔g4 ♔e7 67 ♘g3 ♗b2 ½-½



Ara. Minasian – Marin
Batumi Ech 2002

White has a dominant position. Besides the obvious danger presented by the pawn, Black also faces the unpleasant prospect of a combined attack against his king. It should be added that neither player had too much time left: we were mainly relying on the half-minute addition after each move.

57...♖h3?

Under such circumstances, this move is, to a certain extent, excusable. I wanted to drive the enemy rook away from its ideal position or at least to exchange it in order to make my defence easier.

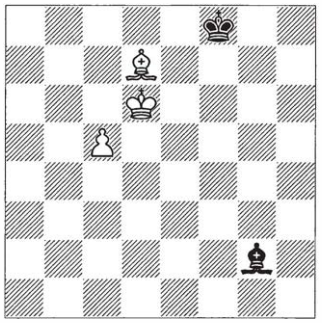
The kind of attack I was afraid of with rooks on the board was 57...♔e7? 58 ♖h7+ ♔d8 59 ♔d6 and Black is already losing.

It is curious that Black's best chance is to avoid simplification; he should have only improved the position of his rook with 57...♖e3! (followed by ...♔e7-d8 if allowed) when it seems that the maximum White can obtain is the endgame ♖+♗ vs ♖.

58 ♖xh3!

This came as a total surprise. With the pawn as far back as c4, what could White be hoping for in the ensuing bishop ending?

58...♗xh3 59 ♔d6 ♗f1 60 c5 ♗b5 61 ♗c6 ♗e2 62 ♗a4 ♗f3 63 ♗d7 ♗g2 *(D)*



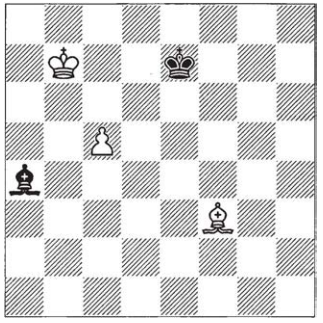
64 ♗c6 ♗f1 65 ♗f3 ♗b5 66 ♗h5 ♗a4 67 ♗f3 ♗b5 68 ♗b7 ♗a4 69 ♗c8 ♔e8 70 ♔c7 ♔e7 71 ♗g4 ♗e8 72 ♗f3

White could unblock the pawn with the simple manoeuvre 72 ♗e2 ♗a4 73 ♔b6 ♔d8 74 ♗b5 but this would only lead to a draw after 74...♗xb5 75 ♔xb5 ♔c7.

72...♗a4

By this stage, both players were firmly convinced that the position was a draw, although I had a rather unpleasant feeling of *déjà vu*.

73 ♔b7 *(D)*



When this move was played, I finally remembered that I had seen a similar position analysed by Grigoriev. With the seconds running out on my clock, I decided to change the defensive set-up, although I understood that I had no time to reach the desired drawish position.

73...♔f6

There is a paradox about this move: without being a mistake, it is the losing move! I saw (or rather remembered) the following variation in a flash: 73...♔d8 74 ♗c6 ♗d1 75 ♔b6 ♗g4 (75...♔c8 loses to 76 ♗b7+, when 76...♔b8 allows mate after 77 c6) 76 ♗b5 ♗f3 77 ♗a6 ♗e4 78 ♗b7 and there is no way to prevent the pawn from advancing. Minasian hadn't seen this; after the game he confessed that he was going to play on until move 80 or so and then offer a draw!

Strongly affected by the loss, I couldn't remember the reason which made me abandon passive defence and initially agreed with my opponent that 73...♔f6 was the decisive mistake. Later, when I calmed down, everything became clear again. During dinner I mentioned the winning variation to the small and sympathetic Armenian delegation, but they needed some time to believe me. This is a rare case when knowing too much is prejudicial for the final result, contrary to the central idea of Chapter 15 (Defending Difficult Endings).

74 ♔b6 ♔e5 75 ♗e2 ♔d4 76 ♗b5 ♗d1 77 c6 ♗g4 78 c7 ♔d5 79 ♗e2 ♗c8 80 ♗a6 ♗g4 81 ♔b7 ♔c5 82 ♔b8 ♔b6

I knew that this position was losing just as I knew that with the kings on d6 and d8 it would be a draw. The problem is that here, unlike the previous variation, the winning manoeuvre is simple.

83 ♗c8 ♗e2 84 ♗h3 ♗a6 85 ♗g2 1-0

15 Defending Difficult Endings

And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.
(MATTHEW 20; 9)

A few years ago, during one of my summer tournaments, I had the honour to receive the visit of a former champion of the Soviet Union. While entering my humble room, he briefly glanced at the table, where a volume of Averbakh's endgame books lay. For a moment I felt very proud and hoped that he would praise my interest in this field. After all, the Soviet Chess School considered the final part of the game of no less importance than the opening.

We indeed talked about endgames, but not really in the way I expected. He gave me several reasons why the study of such a book is just a waste of time: you can never remember those things over the board; practical endgames differ from those included in the book; if you get a lost position from the beginning you never get to the endgame, so it is better to study openings; endgames don't occur that often and if they do, then you should just play them over the board. Besides, endgames are too boring to study...

I think that I managed to hide rather well my disappointment; I didn't even try to argue with my esteemed guest. However, I shall try to provide the reader with a few reasons for studying the endgame.

Good endgame technique can usually compensate for weaker play in the previous phases; in practice, an impressive number of half and full points can be saved by superior play in this last part of the game. This is probably one of the most important arguments for a pragmatic approach: if the final result is favourable, it is of lesser importance if it was achieved by constant good play throughout the whole game or just by a final effort towards the end of it.

Capablanca considered that analysing endgame positions improves one's overall class of play. I can understand that: in a middlegame position, there are sometimes too many factors that act at the same time. It is therefore difficult to distinguish and assimilate them. In the endgame you can see the small mechanisms in their pure form and you can understand better the strengths and limitations of each piece.

You can make a parallel between a chess game and human life. Opening, middlegame and endgame correspond to birth and childhood, youth and maturity, old age and the date with the grim reaper. Most of our fears in real life are connected with the final part, which is virtually unknown; if we knew what happens after, we could live more peacefully and stay better orientated. Not knowing something is often similar to fearing it. The same thing happens in chess. You play the game and from time to time exchange a piece. You can foresee the future events in the middlegame, but, without a systematic study, you have only a vague idea about the multitude of possible endgames arising. Endgame knowledge can help one to be confident during the middlegame and can provide 'tips' about what direction to choose at the critical moments. This can have a decisive influence even if the endgame doesn't actually arise; in such cases it is more like a potential influence.

I have also noticed that hard work on positions with just a few pieces was followed by an increase in the number of endgames that I had to face over the board; this has something to do with the subconscious, or, if you like, with magic.

Speaking about fears, you can never get a final conclusion when studying an opening. The ultimate truth doesn't exist, at least at the limited human level of knowledge. Too much work on the opening might just amplify your fears. With endgames, things are quite different. Complete and definitive knowledge is possible in a multitude of positions. Isn't this the dream of every researcher?

And finally, if I have not managed to convince you completely, I consider the study of endgames as a superior form of culture. Suppose I have one or two free hours: I could read a book or simply watch the TV. I can assure you that neither of these popular activities has ever brought me such intellectual pleasure as working, for instance, with Averbakh's endgame books.

However, the reader might wonder why I have devoted a separate chapter to endgames; among the examples included in the other sections of the book, there are plenty that result in simplified positions. I shall try to explain the reasons behind my decision.

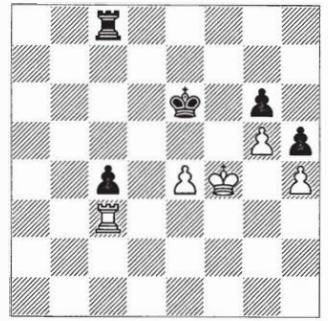
This chapter is not just a collection of endgames where correct (or incorrect) defence was the main theme. The practical material is structured in a way that allows me to highlight the most important aspects of endgame defence, the importance of knowing endgame theory and relating to it in a creative way, as well as subjective and psychological features.

We shall start with two defensive miracles achieved by Mikhail Botvinnik, possibly the strongest and most lucid analytical mind from the whole of chess history.

Rook endings are not only the most frequently seen in practice but also among the most difficult to handle. Rooks are very mobile pieces, which makes the calculation of all the relevant variations virtually impossible. Many authors consider these endings to be of a tactical nature, but I am not sure whether this is an accurate description. I would say that a basic knowledge of theory and general principles should help players greatly when tackling these endings over the board.

Among the positions that form exceptions to Tartakower's famous aphorism "All rook endings are drawish", those where the stronger side has an outside passed pawn supported from behind are especially unpleasant for the defender. The rook must passively blockade the pawn, allowing the opponent to make progress on one wing or the other with the help of zugzwang. For the first example (*see following diagram*), I shall simply quote Botvinnik's comments; there is nothing I can add to them.

"In this position I sealed my move. Of course, my opponent, like myself, knew that Lasker had won a similar ending against Rubinstein (St Petersburg 1914). The only difference was that



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Botvinnik – Euwe
Groningen 1946

there the h-pawns were absent. But during the break for dinner I was able to establish that the presence of these pawns changes the evaluation of the position. I did not find this immediately – I was hindered by the awareness that the great Rubinstein had been unable to save the ending. When I arrived for the resumption of the game, Euwe sympathetically slapped me on the shoulder. He was in no doubt that, if the great Rubinstein had been unable to save such an ending, the outcome was clear. Also in obvious agreement were the spectators, who awaited with impatience the triumph of their favourite."

41 ♔e3 ♔e5 42 ♖c2! c3

"Forcing the enemy pawn to advance."

43 ♔d3 ♖d8+

"Here my opponent looked at me suspiciously. Evidently, he did not like the fact that I was so calm. In the game with Rubinstein, Lasker won by the manoeuvre ...♖c7, ♔e3 ♖h7 followed by ...♖h3 and ...♖g3. After ...♖c7 his opponent could not take the c3-pawn, as after the exchange of rooks the pawn ending is lost [I should merely add that in the aforementioned game the colours were reversed]. But here, the transition into the pawn ending would have led to a draw: 43...♖c7 44 ♖xc3 ♖xc3+ 45 ♔xc3 ♔xe4 46 ♔c4 ♔f4 47 ♔d4 ♔g4 48 ♔e5 ♔xh4 49 ♔f6 ♔g4 50 ♔xg6 h4 51 ♔f6 h3 52 g6 h2 53 g7 h1♕ 54 g8♕+. The h-pawns play a dual role: they rule out a breakthrough by the black rook on the h-file and they lead to the pawn ending being a draw."

44 ♔e3

"Of course, 44 ♔xc3 is risky, as the white king would be cut off from the kingside."

44...♖d4 45 ♖xc3 ♖xe4+ 46 ♔f3 ♖xh4 47 ♖c6! ♖f4+

"After 47...♔f5 48 ♖c5+ ♔e6 49 ♖c6+ White cannot achieve anything."

48 ♔e3 ♖e4+ 49 ♔f3 ♔f5 50 ♖f6+ ♔xg5 51 ♖xg6+! ½-½

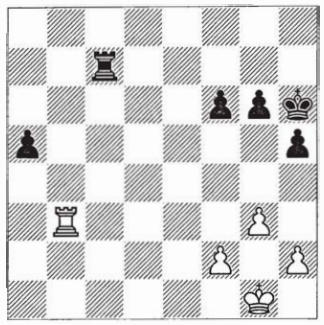
Let's try to draw some conclusions from the game and the comments. Both players knew rather well the theory related with their endgame (after all, another Tartakowerian statement, "theory is the grandmasters' practice" applies to the endgame as well). This concrete knowledge allowed them to evaluate the position as favourable for Black and to anticipate, to a certain extent, the course of the game.

However, Botvinnik went one step further. Checking the lines from the game Lasker-Rubinstein with a comparative sight, he understood that an apparently insignificant detail can make a world of difference. Such small steps often cause entire revolutions in several domains of research; Euwe's reaction to the unpleasant surprise is highly revealing.

It is also remarkable that two world champions (a former and a future) held in such a high regard a player, Rubinstein, who had had his apogee more than 30 years earlier. This should be a signal of alarm for those inclined to neglect the rich inheritance left to us from the classics. More about this last theme later.

We can also look at the problem from a different point of view: despite appearances, the previous position was objectively a draw. 'All' that Botvinnik had to do was discover the correct defensive method.

The following example introduces an essentially different situation: White's position is just as lost as it looks and Botvinnik had to seek practical chances rather than finding an accurate path to a draw. He was also less generous when annotating the game. It must have been more than just the fact that the situation was less relevant from a competitive situation than in the previous case. He was probably more inclined to comment on positions where a scientific approach was possible, rather than those where he had to fish in muddy waters.

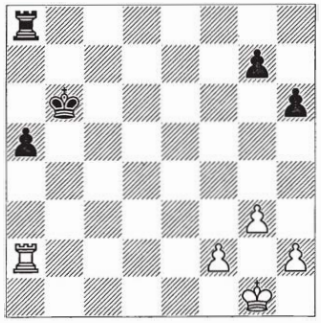


Botvinnik – Borisenko
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1955

44 ♖a3

If White managed to bring his rook behind the enemy pawn, the position would become more or less drawish, but 44 ♖b6 is strongly met by 44...♖a7! 45 ♖xf6 a4 46 ♖b6 a3 47 ♖b1 a2 48 ♖a1 ♔g5 with a relatively simple win.

As an illustration, let's have a brief look at an endgame where the circumstances were slightly less favourable for Black: White managed to block the pawn one step earlier while the black king was on the queenside, far from the main group of pawns. These two minor differences allowed White to put up some resistance, but not enough for a draw.



Kasparov – Karpov
Moscow Wch (6) 1984/5

45 ♔f1 a4 46 ♔e2 ♔c5 47 ♔d2 a3 48 ♔c1 ♔d4 49 f4 ♔e4 50 ♔b1

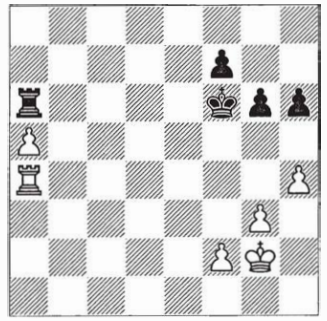
White threatens to free his rook from its defensive task, which is impossible with the pawn on a2. Black has to act concretely.

50...♖b8+ 51 ♔a1 ♖b2! 52 ♖xa3 ♖xh2 53 ♔b1 ♖d2 54 ♖a6 ♔f5 55 ♖a7 g5 56 ♖a6 g4 57 ♖xh6 ♖g2 58 ♖h5+ ♔e4 59 f5 ♖f2 60 ♔c1 ♔f3 61 ♔d1 ♔xg3 62 ♔e1 ♔g2 63 ♖g5 g3 64 ♖h5 ♖f4 65 ♔e2 ♖e4+ 66 ♔d3 ♔f3 67 ♖h1 g2 68 ♖h3+ ♔g4 69 ♖h8 ♖f4 70 ♔e2 ♖xf5 0-1

Even an expert like Botvinnik couldn't have known this game, played 14 years after the moment he gave up competitive chess, but his decision to blockade the pawn as soon as possible is correct.

44...♖a7 45 ♖a4

At the time this game was played, there was some 'theory' on this kind of position too. "When the game was adjourned, no one doubted that Black would win, since Alekhine had won a similar ending against Capablanca in the concluding 34th game of their match for the World Championship (1927)." (Botvinnik).



Alekhine – Capablanca
Buenos Aires Wch (34) 1927

55 ♔f3 ♔e5 56 ♔e3 h5 57 ♔d3 ♔d5 58 ♔c3 ♔c5 59 ♖a2

Because of zugzwang, Black has to abandon the opposition, allowing the white king to advance on one of the wings.

59...♔b5 60 ♔b3 ♔c5 61 ♔c3 ♔b5 62 ♔d4! ♖d6+

The tricky 62...♔b4 hoping for 63 ♔e5 ♔b3 64 ♖a1 ♔b2 loses to 63 ♖a1! ♔b3 64 ♔c5.

63 ♔e5 ♖e6+ 64 ♔f4 ♔a6

Black has managed to free his rook, but allowed the white king to infiltrate on the kingside. There is no time for 64...f6 because of 65 a6! ♖xa6 66 ♖xa6 ♔xa6 67 ♔e4 with a winning pawn ending for White, as demonstrated by Tartakower.

65 ♔g5 ♖e5+ 66 ♔h6 ♖f5

Now, the simplest way to win is 67 ♔g7 ♖f3 68 ♔g8 ♖f6 69 ♔f8 ♖f3 (69...♖f5 70 f4) 70 ♔g7 ♖f5 71 f4 with zugzwang, as indicated later by Alekhine.

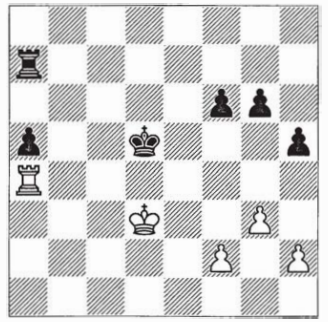
The fact that in Botvinnik's game the pawn is one step back favours White, of course, but not to a sufficient extent to change the evaluation of the position. Botvinnik understood well the essence of the position: he had no saving chances while the kingside was stable and used the first opportunity to create some tension.

45...♔g5?!

The king has to be transferred to the queenside as soon as possible and, according to the nature of chess geometry, the paths passing through g5 and g7 have the same length.

A Botvinnik was needed to prove that Black's last move is a significant inaccuracy. The king is not especially active on g5, but is definitely more exposed.

Black could have avoided the complications by choosing the other route: 45...♔g7 46 ♔f1 ♔f7 47 ♔e2 ♔e6 48 ♔d3 ♔d5 *(D)*. For example:



a) 49 ♔c3 (leaving the kingside untouched gives Black a wider choice) 49...♔c5 50 ♔b3 ♔b5 (another possible regrouping for Black is 50...♖b7+ 51 ♔c3 ♔b5 52 ♖d4 ♖c7+ 53 ♔b3 ♖c5 followed by ...♖f5, ...g5 and the return of

the king to the kingside) 51 ♖e4 a4+ 52 ♔a3 ♖a6 53 h4 ♔c5 54 ♖e2 ♔d4 55 ♖e3. The situation is almost identical to that of Alekhine-Capablanca. The difference that the black king hasn't crossed the e-file yet is not too relevant. Black can patiently improve his position starting with 55...g5 and then bring his rook to e5 at a convenient moment.

b) 49 h4!? (this move, suggested in a slightly different position by one of the greatest experts in rook endings, Nikolai Kopaev, creates the threat of g4 in an attempt to destabilize the position on the kingside) 49...f5! 50 ♔c3 (if White persisted with the kingside plan, then after 50 f3 ♔c5 51 g4 ♔b5 we transpose to Kopaev's original analysis: 52 ♖d4 a4 53 ♔c2 a3 54 ♔b1 ♖a4 55 ♖d6 hxg4 56 ♖xg6 gxf3 and Black is winning) 50...♔c5 51 ♔b3 ♔b5 (with the f5-square occupied by the pawn, the alternate plan from the a-file would be less efficient) 52 ♖d4 a4+ 53 ♔a3 ♔c5 54 ♖d8 ♖a6 55 ♖d7 ♖d6! (the modifications in the pawn-structure allow the rook more mobility) 56 ♖g7 (if 56 ♖e7 then 56...♖d4 planning ...f4 in order to secure the g4-square for the rook) 56...♔d5 57 ♖e7 ♖e6 and so on.

46 f3!! *(D)*

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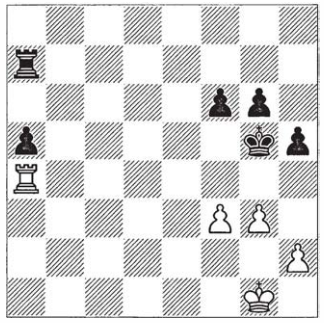

This might look like an insane move: with his king still on the first rank and his pieces apparently uncoordinated, White starts advancing the pawns, and in a way that weakens the second rank. However, the move is dictated by a very concrete approach to the position: good or bad, this is the only possible moment to create some kingside tension, considerably complicating the winning process.

Regarding White's coordination, Botvinnik's final comment on the variation given on the 51st move is very revealing. The plan is in a certain sense similar to and as unexpected as Spassky's queenside plan (...c6, ...b6, ...a5) in his game against Korchnoi (see Chapter 8, The Soul of Chess).

46...♔f5 47 g4+ hxg4?

Black's desire to avoid a weakness on h5 is perfectly understandable, but with this exchange he forfeits any winning chances. Much later, Kopaev showed the right way to continue: 47...♔e6 48 gxh5 gxh5 49 ♔f2 ♔d6 50 ♔e3 ♖e7+! (the only way to prevent White's king from infiltrating to f5) 51 ♔d3 ♖e5 52 ♖f4 ♖d5+! *(D)* (this is a very important intermediate check; previously, only 52...f5 had been analysed, when White manages to hold a draw: 53 ♖h4 ♔d5 54 ♖xh5 f4 55 ♖h4! ♖e3+ 56 ♔d2 ♖xf3 57 ♖h5+ with total liquidation) and now:

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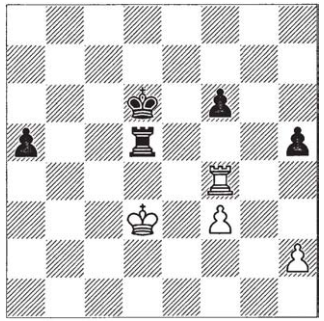


a) 53 ♔c3 ♔e6 54 ♖a4 ♖f5 55 ♔d3 ♔d6 (55...♖xf3+? leads to a theoretical draw after 56 ♔e4 ♖f2 57 ♖xa5) 56 ♔e4 ♖d5 57 ♔e3 ♔c6 58 ♖f4 f5 59 ♖h4 ♔b5 with similar play to line 'b'.

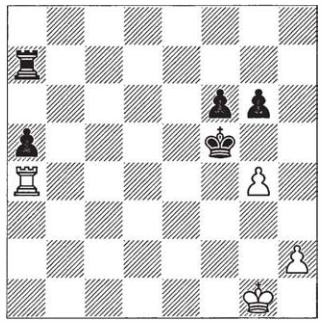
b) 53 ♔e3 f5 54 ♖h4 ♔c5 (this is the point: before taking the pawn, White has to lose one more tempo) 55 ♔f2 ♔b5 56 ♖xh5 a4 57 ♖h8 a3 58 ♖e8 f4! (restricting the king) 59 h4 ♔b4 60 ♖e1 a2 61 ♔g2 ♖a5 62 ♖a1 ♔c3 63 ♔h3 ♔b2 and White's counterplay is too slow.

It would be hard, of course, to calculate all this over the board, especially a move like 52...♖d5+. Borisenko must also have found himself in an unpleasant psychological situation after 46 f3, since things certainly took a

different course from what might have been expected.

48 fxg4+ *(D)*

B



48...♔e5

This allows White to create a dangerous passed pawn on the h-file, ensuring a draw by just one tempo. The alternative is 48...♔g5 when after 49 ♔g2 Black can try two different plans: 49...♔h4 (this intrusion is dangerous only in case of careless play by White; Black can also try to stabilize the situation again, opening the way for his king to the other wing with 49...f5 but White seems to have no problems after 50 gxf5 ♔xf5 51 ♔f3 ♔e5 52 ♔e3 ♔d5 53 ♔d3 ♔c5 54 ♔c3 ♔b5 55 ♖g4 with a probable draw), and now:

a) Botvinnik ends his variation with 50 h3, without saying anything else. Although this gives Black a wide choice, it is good enough to hold: 50...g5!? (this move is aimed to prevent g5 after ...♖b7, just as in the main line) 51 ♔h2 ♖b7 52 ♖xa5 ♖b2+ 53 ♔g1 ♔xh3 54 ♖a6! ♔xg4 55 ♖xf6 ♔g3 56 ♖f1 drawing, thanks to the fact that Black is left with a knight's pawn.

b) 50 ♔g1 (this was given by Kopaev) 50...♔h3 51 ♔h1 ♖b7 (or 51...f5 52 gxf5 gxf5 53 ♔g1 f4 54 ♔f2 with an easy draw) 52 ♖a3+ ♔xg4 53 ♖xa5 with a theoretical drawish position (Kopaev).

49 h4 ♔d5 50 h5 gxh5 51 gxh5 ♔e6

"If the king heads to the queenside, then after 51...♔c5 52 h6 ♔b5 53 ♖h4 ♖h7 54 ♖h5+ ♔b4 55 ♖h4+ it can hide from the checks either on Black's third rank, when the a-pawn is not dangerous, or on Black's eighth rank, but then ♖h4 wins the a-pawn. The position of the white king on g1 is the optimal one for pursuing the opponent's king." (Botvinnik).

52 h6 ♔f7 53 ♖g4!

This move, cutting off the king's way back, makes the draw clear.

53...♔f8

53...♖a8 is of no use: 54 ♖g7+ (54 h7 is also possible and if 54...f5 then 55 ♖g5) 54...♔f8 55 ♖g6 and Black has to repeat moves.

54 ♖f4 ♖a6 55 ♖g4 ♖a7 56 ♖f4 ♔g8 57 ♖xf6 a4 58 ♖f2 ♔h7 59 ♖a2 ♔xh6 60 ♔f2 ♔g5 61 ♔e3 ½-½

We shall now examine a completely reversed situation, when typical drawish positions are misplayed to the point where the defender ends up losing.

As mentioned before, if the defender's rook manages to attack the pawn from behind, the position tends to be drawish. However, this doesn't mean that the game should end automatically with a peaceful result. Ignorance of theory (which, as we shall see, is rather well developed) would leave the defending player without firm reference points, causing him to lose his orientation in the jungle of variations.

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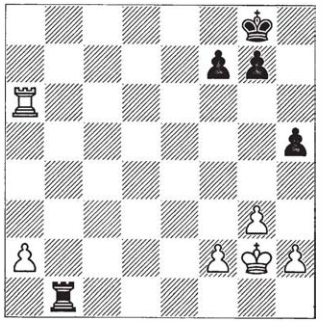

Fernandez Garcia – Kotronias
Dubai OL 1986

Black only needs to move his rook to b2, keeping both wings under observation, to reach a comfortable draw. If White advances his a-pawn, then the rook would be transferred to a2, reaching a well-known theoretical position.

It is remarkable, however, how often strong players lose this type of position. For instance,

Akopian managed to win a similar position as White against Kiril Georgiev at the FIDE Knockout in Las Vegas 1999, but failed to hold a draw as Black in a later game against Svidler.

These confusing results are usually caused by panic: the white passed pawn exerts some sort of hypnotic pressure over the opponent. Akopian's experience with this endgame suggests another interesting psychological aspect: it is usually much more difficult to play for the defending side. I suspect that things would be exactly the opposite if both players knew the position well; it is basically a draw, but the probability of two endgame experts facing against each other in this ending is not so high.

I shall not go into further detail here; this kind of position might some day become part of another book. I shall focus for now on how useful the reference points are in handling these positions.

34 ♖c6!?

White intends to defend his pawn laterally, which would leave his rook more freedom of action.

The straightforward 34 a4 ♖a1 35 ♔f3 ♖a2 36 h4 g6 37 ♔e3 ♔g7 would lead to the already mentioned theoretical position. White will push the pawn as far as a6 and bring up his king. This involves the loss of the f2-pawn, which allows strong kingside counterplay. The endgame has been analysed and published several times, for instance by Kopaev in Averbakh's 5-volume endgame manual and, much later, by Kantorovich in a more detailed article in the Soviet chess magazine *Shakhmatny Biulleten*. It should be mentioned that the present game was also part of Kantorovich's article.

34...♖b2!

It is important to force the pawn to advance. 34...♖a1? is a typical mistake; after 35 ♖c2 g6 36 h4 all White's pawns are safely defended, allowing the king to be transferred to the queenside.

35 a4 ♖a2 36 ♖c4 g6 37 h4 ♔g7 38 ♖f4! *(D)*

An interesting idea. The rook occupies this relatively stable square, defending both weaknesses at the same time, and threatening the king's march to the queenside.

38...♖a3

Cutting off the white king's more active exit.

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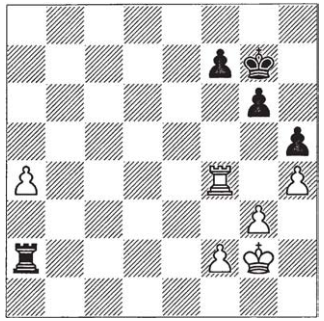


39 ♔f1 ♖a2 40 ♔g2 ♖a3 41 ♔f1 ♖a2 42 ♔e1 f6!

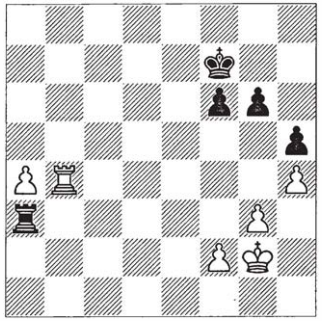
Black can't just sit and wait. He has to destabilize the rook somehow.

43 ♔f1

Once a small weakness has been created in Black's position, the king can return. 43 ♔d1? leads to an immediate draw after 43...g5.

43...♔f7 44 ♖e4 ♖b2 45 ♔g2 ♖a2 46 ♔f1 ♔f8 47 ♔g2 ♖a3 48 ♖b4 ♔f7 *(D)*

W



49 ♖b7+

White can make no further progress with his rook on the fourth rank. Therefore, he switches back to the initial position, hoping that the weakness created by ...f6 will favour him. A direct attempt to bring up the king is risky: 49 ♔f1 ♖a2 50 ♔e1 ♔e6 51 ♔d1? ♖xf2 52 a5 ♖a2 53 ♖b5 ♖a3 54 ♔c2 ♖xg3 and it is now White who must think about a draw. In order to illustrate this, Kantorovich gives a line starting with 55 ♖b3??, failing to notice that 55...♖xb3 56 ♔xb3 ♔d6 wins for Black.

49...♔e6 50 ♖a7 ♔f5?

Kotronias has defended very well so far, but now he fails to see the danger presented by a passive approach. He should have created counterplay on the kingside, either by 50...f5 with the idea ...f4, suggested by Kantorovich, when 51 f4 leads to a theoretical drawish position analysed by Smyslov and Levenfish, or with the simpler 50...g5.

51 ♖a8 ♖a2

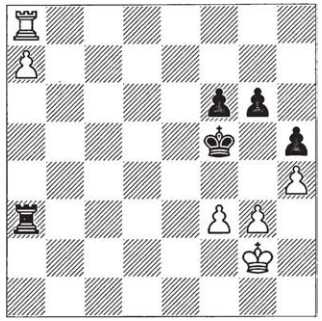
He might have still tried to return to the plans mentioned before with 51...♔e6.

52 a5 ♖a3 53 a6 ♖a2 54 a7

Usually, the advance of the pawn to the seventh rank doesn't promise White much, because his king will not find a place to hide from checks. In this concrete case, the weakness of the seventh rank will have a decisive influence.

54...♖a3 55 f3! *(D)*

B



After this precise move, Black will be able to move only his rook. The remarkable thing is that the position had already occurred in the game Unzicker-Lundin, Amsterdam OL 1954, with the minor difference that the white king was on e2. The game was published several times in endgame books; if Kotronias had known (or remembered) it, he would have probably found the right plan on the 50th move.

55...♖a2+ 56 ♔f1

The king is aiming for g7.

56...♖a1+ 57 ♔f2 ♖a2+ 58 ♔e1 ♖a1+ 59 ♔d2 ♖a6 60 ♔d3 ♖a3+

Switching Black's rook to a lateral position wouldn't help. After 60...♖d6+ 61 ♔c4 ♖d7 62 ♔b5 ♖e7 63 ♔c6 Black is in zugzwang; for instance, 63...♖e6+ (63...♖f7 allows 64 ♔b6 followed by a rook move) 64 ♔d7 ♖a6 65 ♔e7 returning to the main line.

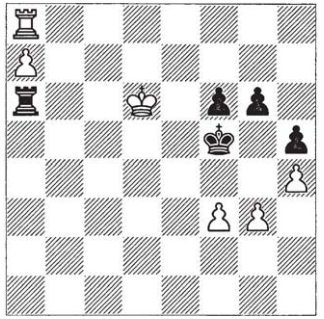
61 ♔d2 ♖a6 62 ♔d3 ♖a3+ 63 ♔d4 ♖a5 64 ♔c4 ♖a1

Black's kingside counterplay is rather slow after 64...♖a3 65 ♔c5 ♖xf3 66 ♖b8 ♖a3 67 a8♕ ♖xa8 68 ♖xa8 ♔g4 69 ♖a3 g5 70 hxg5 fxg5 71 ♔d4 and White wins.

65 ♔c5 ♖a6 66 ♔d5 ♖a3 67 ♔d6 ♖a6+ *(D)*

67...♖a4 allows the elegant 68 ♖c8! ♖a6+ 69 ♖c6 ♖xa7 70 ♖c5#.

W



68 ♔e7 ♖a3 69 ♔f7 ♖a4 70 ♔g7 g5

You might be surprised to find out that this 70th move is in fact a novelty! In this position, although with different move numbers, Lundin played 70...♖a1 which wasn't of much help either: 71 ♔h6 ♖a6 72 ♖b8 ♖xa7 73 ♖b5+ ♔e6 74 ♔xg6 and White won.

71 hxg5 ♔xg5 72 ♔f7 ♔f5

Obviously, the only move.

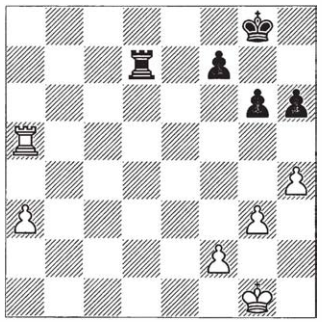
73 g4+! hxg4 74 fxg4+ ♔f4 75 ♔xf6 ♖a6+ 76 ♔f7 ♔g3 77 g5 1-0

We have seen that Kotronias defended rather well for a long time. Did he really deserve to lose the game? Maybe not, but Fernandez definitely deserved to win, due to his inventiveness in creating problems for a well-prepared opponent.

If not augmented by specific knowledge, natural talent or general strength of play are usually of little help in such arid territory.

Let's follow a recent game, where a closely related position to the previous one was terribly misplayed by one of the most gifted chessplayers ever born, who became a (FIDE) world champion half a century later than Botvinnik.

B



Leko – Anand
Linares 2003

Black's position is more difficult than in the previous game. He is two whole tempi away from reaching the ideal position, with the rook on a1 and the pawn on h5. The fact that the a-pawn is not too far advanced as yet should be of help to Black, but it can be felt that Black's next few moves will be decisive for the outcome of the game.

37...♔g7?

This looks like a move dictated by general considerations. The position looks safer with the king 'integrated' in the pawn-structure and one step closer to the centre. If the board had been full of pieces, this might have been the best move, but compare with the moment 46 f3 from the game Botvinnik-Borisenko: the notion of coordination has a much deeper significance in the endgame.

Black had to start setting up, step by step, a drawish position. There seem to be two main alternatives.

a) The first one, 37...♖d1+ 38 ♔g2 ♖a1 can be easily discarded because, once the rook is isolated on the queenside, White can safely play 39 g4, which is similar to the game.

b) This leaves us with 37...h5. However, this move doesn't guarantee an easy life to Black either. In order to avoid an immediate draw, White should play 38 ♖b5 (similar to Fernandez's 34 ♖c6). Black then has a choice between:

b1) The natural 38...♖d1+ 39 ♔g2 ♖a1 is most probably losing. After 40 ♖b3 White's third rank is safely defended and the king is ready to march to the queenside; for instance, 40...♔g7 41 f4 f6 (I can't find any other form of counterplay) 42 ♔f3 g5 43 fxg5 fxg5 44 hxg5 ♔g6 45 ♔f4! (White shouldn't forget that his extra pawn is a rook's pawn; after the careless 45 ♔e4 ♔xg5 46 ♔d4 Black can unexpectedly get a drawish position with 46...h4!) 45...♖f1+ 46 ♔e4 (this move is correct now that the black rook has been forced to abandon the a-file; after 46 ♖f3 ♖a1 White cannot make progress) 46...♔xg5 47 ♔d4 and now 47...h4 leads to a losing position for Black, according to the Nalimov tablebases (Black loses all the pawn endings by one tempo, for instance the one arising after the moves 47...♔g4 48 ♔c4 ♖g1 49 a4 ♖xg3).

b2) 38...♖d3 (this is similar to Kotronias's 34...♖b2) prevents White from reaching the third-rank defensive structure. However, things are slightly worse here for Black, since after 39 a4 ♖a3 a further advance of the pawn is possible: 40 a5. Compared to the previous game, the rook is better placed on the fifth rank, making Black's counterplay more difficult after the predictable ♔f1-e1-d1, ...♖xf2, etc. Only a detailed analysis will reveal the logical result of this position.

Although this last variation is not necessarily losing for Black, neither 37...♖d1+ nor 37...h5 can be considered entirely satisfactory. The most desirable situation would be to prevent both White's main threats: ♖b5 and g4. This aim is achieved by:

c) 37...♖d3!. Black now seems to be closer than ever to the drawish zone; for instance: 38 ♔f1 (38 g4 is premature because of 38...♖d4 39 f3 h5! 40 gxh5 gxh5 with complete equality, while 38 h5 can be safely met by 38...gxh5! followed by a later ...h4) 38...h5 39 ♔e2 ♖b3 and it seems that White has nothing better than to start pushing the pawn, since 40 ♔d2 ♔g7 41 ♔c2 is answered by 41...♖f3.

38 a4

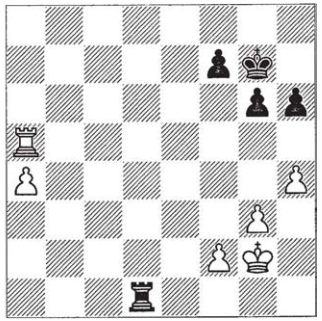
38 ♖b5!? also comes into consideration.

38...♖d1+ 39 ♔g2 *(D)*

39...♖a1?

Relatively best is 39...h5, when 40 ♖b5 ♖a1 41 a5 ♖a3 leads to note 'b2' to Black's 37th move. Since we don't know yet what the outcome of this position should be, we cannot decide which the decisive mistake in this game was: 37...♔g7 or 39...♖a1. With this doubt in

B



mind, I have preferred to split the deserved double question mark between the two main suspects.

40 g4

White's spatial advantage on the kingside should be decisive now, since Black's counterplay will develop at a much slower pace.

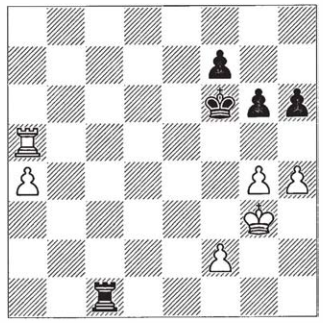
40...♔f6 41 ♔g3?!

This is a good moment to play 41 g5+, when White should win without problems.

41...♖c1?! *(D)*

This move doesn't seem to belong to any plan: it only gives White more freedom of action. The immediate 41...g5, fighting for space, is better.

W



42 ♖b5?!

42 g5+!.

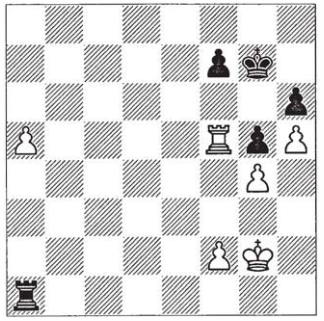
42...g5 43 ♖f5+ ♔g6 44 h5+ ♔g7 45 a5 ♖a1?

Losing without any fight. Remarkably, most of Anand's rook moves in this ending have been mistaken.

This was the last moment when Black could have put up resistance with 45...♖c4 trying to prevent the king's centralization. In this case the win is anything but easy. A possible try is 46 ♔f3 (if 46 f3 then 46...♖c2 cutting off the king) 46...♖a4 47 ♖d5 ♔f6 48 ♔e3 ♔e6! (48...♖xg4? allows White to improve his rook's position by 49 ♖d4 ♖g1 50 ♖a4, with a winning ending) 49 ♖b5 ♖xg4 50 ♖b6+ ♔e5 51 ♖xh6 ♖a4 52 ♖a6 and White's pawns look dangerous.

46 ♔g2! *(D)*

B



Within only 10 moves, Black's position has constantly deteriorated, in an almost grotesque way. If I hadn't known the names of the players in advance, I would have never guessed that the game was played in Linares; not in the super-GM tournament, anyway.

Anand initially rejected positions with the white rook on the fifth rank just to allow it later in a much worse form: the rook safely defends all the pawns and nothing can stop the king's march.

46...♖e1 47 f3 ♖e6

This barrier will be easier to cross.

48 ♔f2 ♔f8 49 ♖b5 ♔g7 50 ♖f5 ♔f8 51 ♖c5 ♔g7 52 ♖b5!

Zugzwang!

52...♔f8 53 ♖b6 ♖e5 54 a6 ♔g7 55 a7

Now the win is easy.

55...♖a5 56 ♖b7 ♖a3 57 ♔e2 ♔f6 58 ♔d2 ♔e6 59 ♔c2 f6 60 ♔b2 ♖a4 61 ♔b3 ♖a1 62 ♔b4 ♔d6 63 ♖h7 ♔e5 64 ♔b5 ♖a2 65 ♔b6 ♔d5 1-0

One of the first things we learn in chess is that a knight is equal in value (or, better said, in

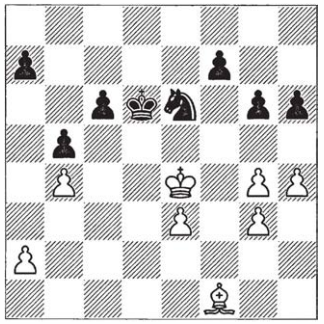
force) to a bishop. With the receptivity typical for the 'tender' ages, we accept this without asking ourselves how on earth would equality be possible between two pieces with such a different way of moving. We would, nevertheless, prefer the knight, not only because it is the best imitation of something from the real life, but also for the balky way to move: imagine, it can sometimes jump over a whole row of pieces!

After this period (unforgettable, I'm sure, for every one of us), we start to discern the concrete differences between these pieces. The most obvious thing is the bishop's greater mobility. If we remove all the pieces from the board, we note that the bishop has between 7 and 13 squares at its disposal, depending on its position, while the maximum the knight can get is 8 squares! The bishop's limitations are also obvious: it can only move to squares of the same colour.

The 'equality' should be regarded more as a statistical matter, but this is, of course, of little importance when playing a concrete game. The ability to foresee which of these two pieces will be stronger in the kind of endgame just about to arise is an 'ingredient' of great players' preparation.

I have chosen for the end of this chapter two examples where first the bishop and then the knight managed to save what initially looked to be desperate positions. After lots of suffering, the equality between these pieces was confirmed again and again...

W



Marin – Svidler
Elista OL 1998

As a consequence of a miscalculation in an equal position, I had allowed my pawn-structure to be terribly spoiled. After further simplifications, we reached the diagram position. My bishop looks like an awfully bad piece, while the black knight has all those squares at his disposal...

For a moment I was tempted to resign. Try to imagine my feeling: on the other side of the board was sitting a player who had a positive score against Kasparov; wouldn't it show a lack of respect to continue defending such ruins? Just by coincidence, some of my friends, who had finished their games elsewhere in the Chess Palace, came to watch our match. I wished I could explain to them with my eyes that it had been just an oversight; since this was impossible, the gloomy position on the board was supposed to reflect my chess understanding.

But then, just when resignation seemed the only way out of my situation, I happened to see that next to me Nisipeanu had sacrificed his queen and was probably going to play a very spectacular game (see Chapter 10, Queen Sacrifices). On the other boards, the situations were also quite interesting. Well, I thought, we can't miss a great result against the world's strongest team just because somebody on the first board throws his pawns in all directions. Without this sudden revelation, the game might have been found in the next chapter (Premature Resignation).

32 h5!

Having quite some experience with the English Opening, I am rather used to lengthening the diagonal for my light-squared bishop with moves such as b4-b5 or even a4-a5-a6, but I never before had the occasion of doing it with such pawns as in the present game. As awkward as it looks, the last move is the only chance to continue the fight.

32...♘g5+

32...g5 allows a dangerous activation of the king with 33 ♔f5.

33 ♔d4 ♘e6+ 34 ♔e4 a6

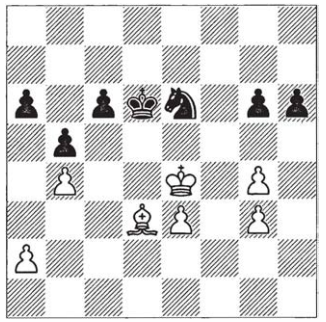
Black prepares his queenside break.

35 hxg6 fxg6

As weak as it seems, the white e-pawn has become a passed pawn. It will later save the game for White.

36 ♗d3 *(D)*

B



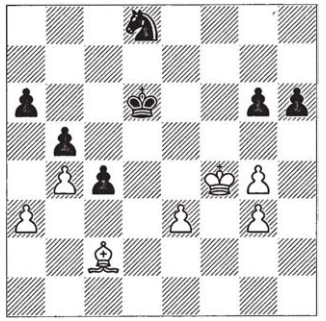
This is not an obvious move either: why would the bishop stay behind the king? The idea is that, in order to make progress, Black will have to move the knight, allowing the king to go to f4 and d4, when the g6-pawn would remain attacked. It should also be mentioned that in spite of its apparent instability, the king ensures White a spatial advantage in the centre.

36...c5 37 a3 c4

The alternative is 37...cxb4 38 axb4 ♘d8 but White seems to hold here: 39 ♔d4 ♘c6+ 40 ♔c3 ♘e5 41 ♔d4! and with his queenside pawns blockaded on light squares, Black cannot achieve much. He would need to be constantly alert to the threat of ♗e4-b7 or (if Black plays ...g5) ♗f5-c8.

38 ♗c2 ♘c7 39 ♔d4 ♘e6+ 40 ♔e4 ♘d8 41 ♔f4 *(D)*

B



41...g5+

A necessary concession: Black has to give up control of the f5-square.

42 ♔f5 ♘c6 43 ♗d1 ♘e5

With the white pawn still on e3, Black would have had to break on the queenside with 43...a5 44 bxa5 ♘xa5 but the only significant difference compared to the game is that the c5-square has become available, which doesn't seem to influence the battle too much; for instance, 45 e4 ♘c6 46 ♔f6 ♘e5 47 ♔f5 ♘d3 48 ♔f6.

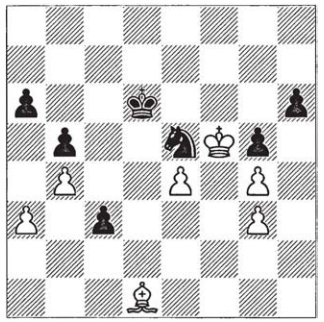
44 e4

White has managed to activate his position. Supported by the king and, in some cases, the bishop, the e-pawn becomes strong enough to restrict Black in his actions.

44...c3 *(D)*

Black has to keep the pawn safely blockaded. After, for instance, 44...♘d7 45 ♗c2 ♘b6? White achieves central domination with 46 e5+ ♔e7 47 ♔e4.

W



45 ♗c2!

We can see here a typical picture: the knight cannot put the bishop in zugzwang. All White needs is to choose the squares with care. 45 ♗b3? is bad because of 45...♘f3! 46 ♔f6 ♘d4 47 e5+ ♔d7 48 e6+ (there is no time for 48 ♔f7 because after 48...♘xb3 49 e6+ ♔c7 50 e7 c2 51 e8♕ Black queens as well, keeping an extra knight: 51...c1♕) 48...♔e8 49 ♗d5 ♘xe6! and Black wins (unlike after 49...c2?? 50 e7 followed by ♗f7+, when he should lose).

45...♘c4

The key difference is that after 45...♘f3 46 ♔f6 ♘d4 47 e5+ ♔d7 (or if 47...♔d5 then 48 ♗g6 and Black is in zugzwang!) the move 48 ♔f7 (48 e6+? is worse now owing to 48...♘xe6 49 ♗f5? ♔d6!, when White has given up the pawn for nothing) is possible, because Black would block his own pawn if he takes the

bishop, losing an important tempo in the pawn race.

46 ♔f6 ♘e5

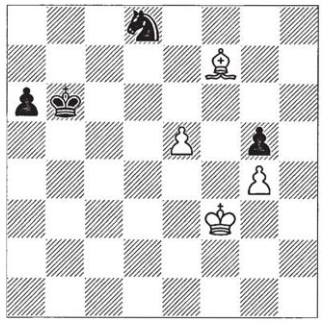
46...♘e3 isn't dangerous either; not for White, anyway: 47 e5+ ♔c7 48 e6 ♘xg4+ 49 ♔f7 and it is time for Black to think about a draw: 49...♘e5+ 50 ♔f8 ♔d6 51 e7 ♘d7+ 52 ♔e8 (or 52 ♔f7 ♘e5+ with a draw) 52...♘e5! (52...♘f6+? 53 ♔f7 ♔e5 allows 54 g4 with zugzwang) 53 ♔f8 ♘d7+ with a perpetual pursuit of the king. These variations, resulting after risky play by Black, create a direct link with the next game, where the knight executes a similar dance in order to stop two enemy pawns.

47 ♔f5 ♘c6 48 ♔f6 ♘e5 ½-½

The conclusion from this game is that even under highly unfavourable circumstances, the bishop remains a basically long-range piece; its temporary passivity was remedied by the paradoxical h4-h5. The ability of winning (or losing) a tempo along a diagonal with at least three available squares was also of help. And finally, you should never give up hope if you don't see clearly how you are going to lose!

The last message applies to the next game too. The only difference is that the main theme is the surprising vitality of an apparently passive knight. The chapter ends the same way it started: with Botvinnik as the main figure.

W



Portisch – Botvinnik
Wijk aan Zee 1969

Botvinnik's position had been hopeless for a long time. Although after the third adjournment it looked like Black had got some chances, Botvinnik recounts that he was in no special mood to look at it. "It seemed that my suffering in this game would never end." The long-range bishop and the active white king offer White an indisputable advantage. It was difficult to foresee the miracles carried out later by the apparently passive knight. The next few moves are practically forced.

73 ♗a2 ♘c6 74 ♔e4 ♘e7

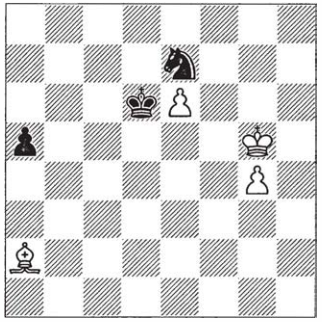
The knight occupies in advance a dark square in front of the pawn. At the same time, he creates a barrier in the king's way, which can be broken only by playing...

75 e6

This is, however, a small achievement for Black. By placing his second pawn on a light square, White restricts the sphere of action of his own bishop and makes the d6-square available to the enemy king.

75...♔c5 76 ♔e5 a5 77 ♔f6 ♔d6 78 ♔xg5 *(D)*

B



78...♔e5

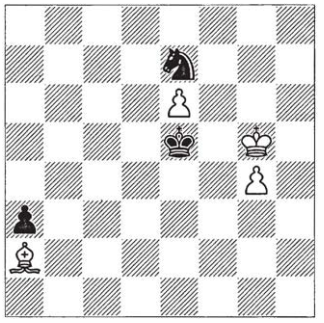
White has managed to get a second passed pawn, but Black's pieces exert some sort of central domination.

79 ♗b3

Portisch plays for zugzwang. Once Black's a-pawn moves have run out, he will have to move either of his pieces, thus letting the white king advance to f6 or g6. This is doubtless the most dangerous plan, which, for a long time during his home analysis, made Botvinnik consider his position as losing. The immediate 79 ♔h6 is not too effective: 79...♔f4 80 g5 ♔f5! and 81 g6 wins the knight, but loses both pawns: 81...♘xg6 82 ♗b1+ ♔xe6.

79...a4 80 ♗a2 a3 *(D)*

W



81 ♗b3

Black seems to have serious problems now: will he be able to stop the pawns?

After 81 ♔h6 ♔f4 82 g5 ♔f5 83 ♗b3 the zugzwang is not real, as Black has 83...♔e5!, like in the game.

81...♘c6! 82 ♔g6 ♘e7+ 83 ♔g7

The main line of Botvinnik's analysis went 83 ♔f7 ♘c6 84 g5 (84 e7 ♘xe7 85 ♔xe7 leads to a simple draw after 85...♔f4 86 ♗e6 a2!) when Black has the study-like 84...♔f5!, meeting 85 g6 with 85...♘e5+. It is interesting how Botvinnik actually discovered this defence. He was analysing the position together with Keres and suddenly imagined this final position, but without seeing a concrete way to reach it. It took Keres, an experienced study composer, just few moments to find the right move-order, starting with 81...♘c6!.

83...♘c6 84 g5 ♔f5 85 ♔h6 ♘e7 86 ♗a2

Is it zugzwang again?

86...♔e5!

Not really!

87 ♔g7

After 87 g6 ♔f6 88 g7 the knight is in time again: 88...♘f5+ with an immediate draw.

87...♔f5 88 ♔f7 ♘g6 ½-½

In view of the line 89 ♗b1+ ♔xg5 90 ♗xg6 a2 91 e7 a1♕ 92 e8♕ ♕f6+ with complete simplification, the players agreed to a draw. 88...♘c6, returning to the basic position, is also possible.

16 Premature Resignation

And when he was come in, he saith unto them, "Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth."
(MARK 5; 39)

"Do you have a nice time playing with me; are you enjoying yourself?" These were the words once addressed by a famous veteran to a much younger opponent, whose unwillingness to resign started to look like a lack of respect.

Chess is intended to be a gentlemen's game and every player should know when the time has come to call it a day. But on the other hand, before resigning, you should be absolutely sure that all the defensive possibilities have been exhausted.

Leaving aside the moral aspects, playing on for a while in a losing position is completely lacking in risk. We have already seen many cases of miraculous escapes. I once asked a fellow GM why he resigned in what looked to be a rather complicated position. "Well," he answered, "it would have been too dangerous to continue." Until this day, I don't know if he was speaking seriously...

However, this is not a typical case. It had to do more with a reduced lust for play that day or with the sincere wish to avoid offending the opponent. Premature resignation usually comes as a result of fatigue and demoralization after a difficult defence, or after a sudden shock. Under such circumstances, the defending player might overestimate the dangers or lack energy to find a hidden way to escape.

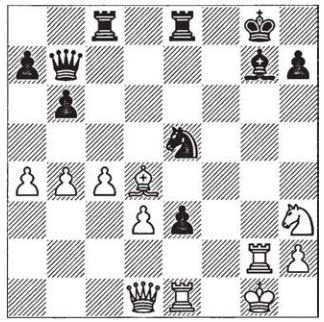
Mikhail Tal was more than once accused of exerting hypnotic influence over his opponents. My impression is that it was rather his style of play that confused and sometimes discouraged his opponents.

The next diagram features an example where confusion was shared by many annotators too.

28...e2!

After this elegant move, Larsen was so impressed that he resigned immediately.

B



Larsen – Tal
Bugojno 1984

0-1

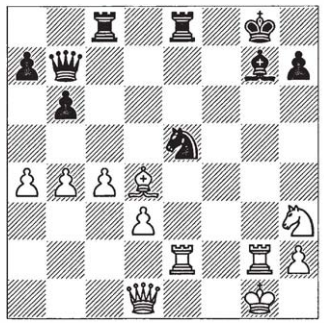
He might have been hoping for 28...♘f3+?, when White wins with 29 ♕xf3 ♕xf3 30 ♖xg7+ ♔f8 31 ♖f1.

The end of the game was published in several combination anthologies, but nobody seems to have noticed up until now that Larsen's decision was at least premature. White could have kept fighting:

29 ♖exe2! *(D)*

Annotating the game for *Informator*, Tal only gives 29 ♕xe2 ♘f3+ 30 ♕xf3 ♖xe1+ 31 ♔f2 ♖f1+, when Black wins.

B



29...♘f3+ 30 ♔f1!

If the king went into the corner, the rook would remain pinned on the next move.

30...♘xd4 31 ♖xg7+! ♔xg7

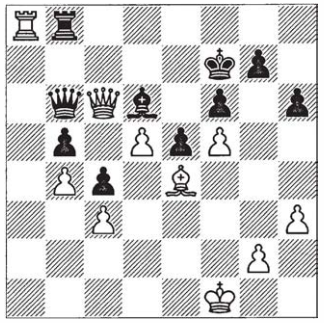
Or 31...♕xg7 32 ♖g2.

32 ♖xe8 ♕h1+ 33 ♘g1 ♖xe8 34 ♕g4+

White can give several checks before choosing the right moment to take the knight. Black keeps some advantage, of course, but the exposed position of the black king and the connected passed pawns give White reasonable chances.

The following game was decisive in a psychological way for the outcome of a highly controversial match.

W



***Deep Blue* – Kasparov**
New York (2) 1997

Up until this point, Deep Blue had been playing an irreproachable strategic game; Kasparov must have been both surprised by these untypical skills of the computer and discouraged. The simple exchange of queens would now lead to a hopeless endgame for Black, but computers cannot make practical decisions, since they are set to play always 'the very best move'.

45 ♖a6?

Kasparov was so impressed by this new blow that he didn't bother to check the variations and resigned. After all, computers are at their best in tactical play, aren't they?

1-0

Apparently, Garry must have ignored (or simply forgotten) the so-called horizon effect that sometimes affects our silicon opponents. Computers have problems, for instance, in evaluating positions where a long series of checks is possible, because the variations are too long and end somewhere beyond the limit of their physical power. White's last move was in fact a blunder and against a human player Garry might have found the saving move:

45...♕e3!

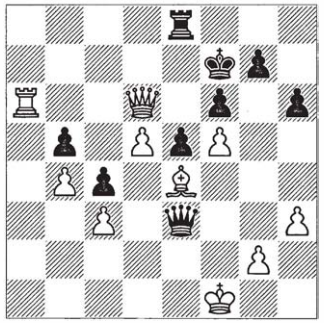
Now the exposed position of the white king saves Black. For instance:

46 ♕xd6

46 ♕d7+ was later suggested by Deep Blue itself; this might have preserved some chances for an advantage after 46...♔g8 47 ♕xd6 ♖f8 48 ♕c5 ♕xe4 49 d6 but the resulting position is anything but clear.

46...♖e8! *(D)*

W



This second move is in fact the key to Black's counterplay.

47 h4!?

White clears the h3-square for the king. The bishop is not a reliable defender: 47 ♗f3 ♕c1+ 48 ♔f2 ♕d2+ 49 ♗e2 ♕f4+ 50 ♔e1 ♕c1+ 51 ♗d1 ♕xc3+ 52 ♔f1 ♕c1! and White cannot avoid the repetitions.

47...♕xe4

This is the simplest way.

48 ♖a7+ ♔g8 49 ♕d7 ♕f4+ 50 ♔g1 ♕e3+ 51 ♔h2 ♕f4+ 52 ♔h3

Has Black run out of gas?

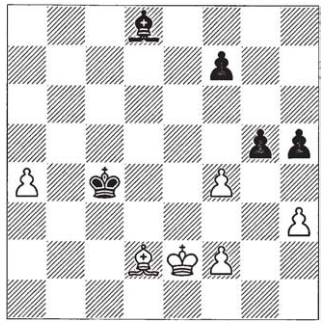
52...♖e7!

Not really! White cannot avoid the draw any more.

The following position has been a subject of controversy for many years. Neither of the

players tended to annotate games for the magazines; public opinion was abandoned in deep confusion. The game was played in the last round of the championship and had a crucial importance for the qualification to the Interzonal (Spassky was satisfied with a draw, while Stein needed a win).

B



Stein – Spassky
USSR Ch (Moscow) 1961

The game was adjourned and Spassky sealed the move...

41...g4

...but on the next day resigned without resuming.

1-0

This decision raised a strong wave of criticism; most of the annotators considered Spassky's resignation premature. Four years later, in an article published in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia*, Bronstein claimed that the decision had been also unnecessary: Spassky could have saved himself. Another year passed until Spassky's trainer, Igor Bondarevsky, gave an accurate verdict in the book *Spassky shturmuiot Olimp* (Spassky storms the Olympus) but his analysis was so concise that it didn't have the desired impact. Much later, in a book about Leonid Stein (published in 1980), Gufeld tried to put the missing pieces together in Bondarevsky's analysis, but the only thing he managed was to mess things up. In a book dedicated to the Fischer-Spassky match, Polihroniade and Stefaniu mention the episode, ending with Stein's confession that he hadn't found a win. However, this looks more like speculation on the basis of the general confusion created around the whole matter.

I shall try to give the reader an accurate and complete picture of this interesting endgame position.

42 hxg4 hxg4 43 a5

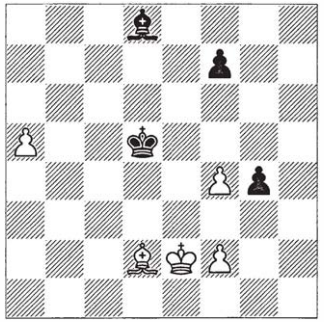
After this natural series of moves Black's best chance is a rather unnatural idea:

43...♔d5! *(D)*

The king keeps the passed pawn under control, while interfering with the enemy king's intention to attack the kingside pawns.

The pawn ending arising after 43...♔b5 44 ♔d3 ♗xa5 45 ♗xa5 ♔xa5 is hopeless for Black: the doubled pawns are very strong. A sample line is 46 ♔e4 ♔b4 47 ♔f5 ♔c4 48 ♔xg4 ♔d3 49 ♔g5 ♔e4 50 f5 ♔e5 51 f6 ♔e6 52 f4 followed by ♔h6-g7.

W



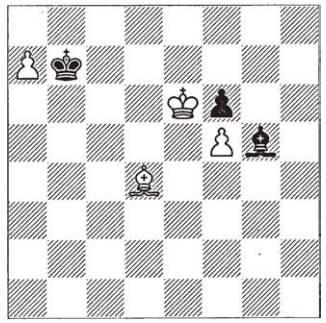
Some of the annotators believed that Spassky didn't consider 43...♔d5 during his home analysis. Bondarevsky denied this supposition and gave a refutation of the move itself:

44 a6 ♔c6 45 f5!

This move is possible only because 45...♔b6 would be answered by 46 ♗a5+!, winning.

After the careless 45 ♔d3? Black manages to set up a fortress with 45...f5! helped by the fact that the a8 corner is of the opposite colour to the bishops. A possible continuation is 46 ♗e3 ♗a5 47 ♔c4 ♗e1 48 a7 ♔b7 49 ♔d5 g3 50 fxg3 ♗xg3 51 ♔e5 ♗xf4+ with an immediate draw.

Unfortunately, Bondarevsky ends his variation here (after 45 f5!), with the laconic comment that the game would implacably reach the following position:



Let's try to fill the gap between these moments:

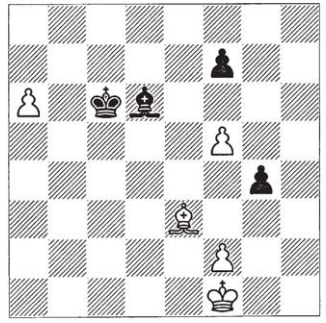
45...♗e7 46 ♗e3 ♗d6 47 ♔f1! *(D)*

Gufeld claims that the white king should attack the g4-pawn, forcing Black to exchange it with ...g3. This was a naïve deduction from Bondarevsky's comment. In fact, the only way to attack g4 is 47 ♔d3 ♗c7 48 ♔e4 ♗d6 49 a7 ♔b7 50 f6?, when 50...♗h2! followed by ...g3 and a later ...♗xf6 draws easily.

Ironically, it is White who has to provoke the exchange of the pawns, in order to get rid of the weakness blocked on a dark square and to get some manoeuvring space on the kingside. However, 47 f3? is premature here, because of 47...g3! 48 ♔f1 ♗b4 49 ♔g2 ♗e1, when White cannot make progress.

In the following line, White could also play a7 at an earlier moment, but in principle, the black king feels less comfortable on c6 than on b7.

B

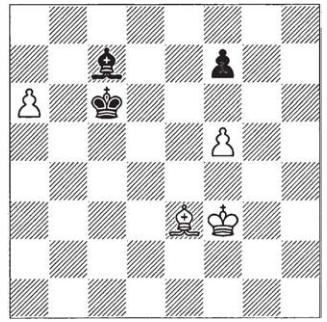


47...♗e5 48 ♔g2 ♗d6 49 f3 gxf3+

The exchange is forced now; after 49...g3 50 f4 the pawn would be lost anyway.

50 ♔xf3 ♗c7 *(D)*

W



51 ♔g4

This plan is a bit slow, but wins with less effort and less need for knowledge of bishop ending theory.

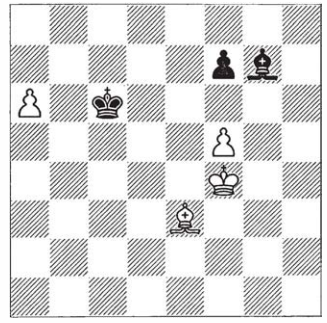
A more straightforward approach is 51 ♔e4 ♗d6 52 a7 ♔b7 53 ♔d5 ♗g3 54 ♗d4 ♗f4 55 a8♕+! ♔xa8 56 ♔c6. It might seem that Black has little to fear: the f5-pawn has two dark squares to cross before it could promote. However, if we relate this position to the game Ara.Minasian-Marin (from Chapter 14, Simplification) we understand immediately that White is winning. In this line, the absence of the f2-pawn is essential; otherwise, Black would manage to get a passed pawn as well (...♗g5-h4 and ...f6, intending to meet ♗xf6 with ...♗xf2).

51...♗e5 52 ♔g5 ♗g7

The only way to stop the king reaching g8.

53 ♔f4! *(D)*

B



Black will have no time now to return his bishop to the h2-b8 diagonal.

53...♗f6 54 ♔e4 ♗g7 55 a7 ♔b7 56 ♔d5 ♗f8 57 ♗f2!

One last finesse: the immediate 57 ♗c5 ♗h6 58 ♔d6 leads nowhere because of 58...♗f8+.

57...♗e7 58 ♗c5 ♗f6 59 ♔d6 ♗c3 60 ♔e7 f6 61 ♔e6 ♗e5 62 ♔d5

Threatening ♗d4.

62...♗f4 63 ♗d4 ♗g5 64 ♔e6

We have finally reached Bondarevsky's diagram. White wins easily:

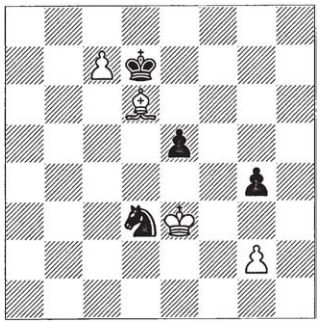
64...♗h4 65 ♗xf6 ♗f2 66 ♗e7 ♗d4 67 ♗d6

followed by ♗e5.

We can now draw the conclusion that Spassky's resignation was justified, but a bit premature, not just because Stein might not have found the win, but also for the public's sake. If neither of the two outstanding players planned to publish any analysis, it would have been worth showing the main line at least during the resumption of the game. As we have seen, Black hadn't yet exhausted his defensive ideas.

Exercise 16.1

B



Keres – Lengyel
Luhačovice 1969

The game was adjourned here for the second time and Black resigned without resuming play. Was his decision justified?

Solutions to the Exercises

2.1

23...♗xg2+ 24 ♔xg2 ♕h3+!!

This double sacrifice allows the cavalry to march in with perfect coordination.

25 ♔xh3 ♘g5+ 26 ♔g2 ♘h4+ 27 ♔f1 g2+ 28 ♔f2 ♘h3# (0-1)

3.1

He doesn't need to!

21 ♖af1!! ♗h3

Similar to capitulation, but Black is also losing after 21...♕xc3 22 ♕xc3 ♗xc3 23 ♖f8+ ♔h7 ('better' than 23...♔g7 24 ♖1f7#) 24 ♗xe4 ♗h3 25 ♖1f7+ ♗g7 (25...♘g7 loses the h3-bishop: 26 ♗xg6+ ♔xg6 27 ♘f4+ ♔h7 28 ♘xh3) 26 ♗xg6+ ♔xg6 27 ♘h4+ ♔h7 28 ♖xa8 ♘xa8 29 ♖xb7 with a material advantage and strong threats like ♖xa7 and ♘f3-g5.

21...♘f6 also leaves White with a clear advantage after 22 ♗f4 ♕e7 23 ♗g5.

22 ♘xe4 ♖e8 23 ♘g5

and Black soon resigned.

3.2

Not at all! Everything had been calculated until the smallest detail:

26 ♖cg1!!

The third and final shock! Before this move was made on the board, Zukertort might have still hoped that Anderssen had overlooked that 26 ♕h6? loses to 26...♕xf3+!.

26...♔h8

Accepting the 'gift' is simply impossible here: 26...♕xd3 27 ♖xg7+ ♖xg7 28 ♖xg7+ ♔f8 (28...♔h8 doesn't prevent 29 ♖g8+! either) 29 ♖g8+! ♔f7 30 ♘xe5+ winning the queen.

With his move, Black defends against ♖xg7, but falls victim to a different attacking scheme.

27 fxg7+ ♔g8

Against 27...♖xg7 Neishtadt suggests what seems to be the simplest way to continue: 28 ♕h6! ♖dg8 29 ♗e4! when the attack is impossible to stop any more, because 29...♕xe4? allows a spectacular mate with 30 ♕xh7+!!.

28 ♕h6 *(D)*

B

Creating the unstoppable threat of ♕xh7+, ♖h3+ and ♖h8#. Zukertort's defence only prolongs the line.

28...♕d6 29 ♕xh7+! ♔xh7 30 f6+ ♔g8

Once again, the bishop is not really hanging, because 30...♕xd3 leads to mate one move earlier: 31 ♖h3+ ♔g8 32 ♖h8#.

31 ♗h7+ ♔xh7 32 ♖h3+ ♔g8 33 ♖h8# (1-0)

4.1

Anderssen might have thought that the game was already over; the previous phase of the game didn't offer him reasons to suspect his young opponent's inventiveness. Otherwise he wouldn't have deviated from the main plan just for the sake of winning a bishop.

21 ♘xe7?

21 ♔h1! wins rather easily; for instance, 21...♗f8 22 ♖g1+ ♔h8 23 ♘xf6.

21...♖b5! 22 ♘f5+?!

Playing this move, White was probably expecting Black's resignation. 22 f4?! is also insufficient because of 22...♔f8! (oh, this king again...); for instance, 23 f5 ♖e5 24 ♕h6+ ♔xe7 25 ♕xh7 ♕c8 threatening both ...♖h8 and ...♕xc2, with a roughly level position. Just as one move earlier, the prophylactic 22 ♔h1 is

better, and keeps some advantage: 22...♖e5 23 ♕f4! (attacking both the f6- and a4-pawns) 23...♕xe7 24 ♖g1+ ♔h8 25 ♕xa4 retaining an extra pawn in a slightly unusual position.

22...♖xf5 23 ♕d3

Much to his disappointment, White has to admit that instead of winning material, he exchanged his strong knight for the passive bishop. 23 ♕xe8?! is met by 23...♖g5+ 24 ♔f1 (24 ♔h1? leads to mate after 24...♕h3!) 24...♕h3+ 25 ♔e2 ♖e5+, when Black is no worse.

23...♖ee5

Black has finally managed to equalize. His slightly worse structure is compensated by the active placement of the rooks. Only a further mistake led Steinitz to a defeat in this historical game.

4.2

36...♔h8!

By removing the king from the dangerous opposition with the white rook, Euwe prepares to take control of the h-file. The careless 36...♖h7? allows 37 f5! with a crushing attack.

37 ♗h4?!

Falling into the trap. Alekhine might have thought that his inexperienced opponent had missed this move. Karpov and Matsukevich recommend 37 ♖h2+ ♖h7 38 ♖xh7+ ♖xh7 39 ♔g2 but Black shouldn't have any problems holding this position.

37...♕xh4! 38 ♖h2 ♖h7 39 ♖xh4 ♖xh4 40 ♕e2 ♖fh7 41 ♕g2 ♖h3

Black has more than enough compensation for the sacrificed queen.

5.1

Yes, there is! He should bring his knight to the apparently most passive position on the whole board:

60...♘a5! 61 ♔e4

If White tries to cross his opponent's intentions with 61 ♗c5 then 61...♘c4 forces a repetition of the position.

61...♘b3! 62 ♔d5 ♘a1! 63 ♔c4 b3 ½-½

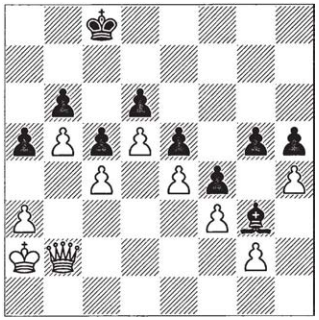
We have reached the same fortress as in the game Marin-Florean.

5.2

The correct reaction is 2 ♕d2 followed by ♔b3, ♘b2, ♔a4 and, eventually, the transfer of the knight to b3 to win the a5-pawn. However, the game continued:

2 ♘xb6+? cxb6 3 h4 *(D)*

B



White probably relied on this move, but in vain. The hypnosis caused by the huge material advantage was irresistible...

3...gxh4 4 ♕d2 h3! 5 gxh3 h4

The fortress is closed now and White had to resign himself to splitting the point.

6.1

65...b3!

The apparently more logical continuation 65...♖h2+? fails to save the game: 66 ♔e3 b3 67 ♖a7! b2 68 ♖a6+ ♔c7 69 ♖b6 and once the pawn is stopped, the win is rather easy for White.

66 ♔c3 b2! 67 ♔xb2 ♖b1+!

The king cannot take the rook due to stalemate, but it can't escape the first-rank checks either. Therefore:

½-½

6.2

This was what Chigorin thought, and he rushed to 'force' the exchange of queens:

45 ♕b6+??

The cold shower then came:

45...♔a8!! ½-½

Taking the queen gives stalemate, while 46 ♔a6 makes no progress either after 46...♕c8+.

6.3

Yes it was! Although 66...♖xa5 67 ♕xg6+ ♔h4 also looks safe, the game move is simpler to calculate – if you see the final idea, of course.

The game continued...

67 ♕xg6+ ♔h4 68 ♖xa1 ♕xa1+ 69 ♔h2

...when there was apparently no satisfactory defence against the two mating threats: ♕g3# and g3#. However, Black had seen one move deeper:

69...♕h1+! 70 ♔xh1 ½-½

7.1

Steinitz played:

34...h5!

This avoids a cunning trap set by his opponent. 34...♕e2?! leads to a draw by perpetual check after 35 ♗f8! (the less spectacular 35 ♗c1 is equivalent) 35...♕xd3 36 ♖xh6+ ♔g8 37 ♖gxg6+ ♔xf8 38 ♖f6+ ♔e7 39 ♖e6+ and the king has no escape.

The game continued:

35 ♗b2 ♖d5 36 ♕c2 ♕e2 37 ♕b3 ♕b5 38 ♕c3 ♖e2 39 f4 ♖xd4 40 ♕f3 ♕d5 0-1

7.2

1...♕xe3!! 2 ♕f8+

Understanding his opponent's idea, White tries to step aside. Black would have no problems after the acceptance of the sacrifice: 2 fxe3 ♘g4+ 3 ♕xg4 (3 ♔h3 leads to a perpetual after 3...♘f2+ while the retreat to the first rank allows mate in two) 3...hxg4 4 ♔g1 (or 4 a4 ♖d1 followed by ...♖a1, controlling the pawn and cutting off the king at the same time) 4...♖d2 5 ♔f1 ♖b2 6 a4 ♖b1+ 7 ♔e2 ♖b2+ and White cannot abandon the kingside.

2...♔g6 3 ♕e8+ ♔h6 4 ♕xd7

White has dismantled the initial perpetual check mechanism because he plans to meet 4...♘g4+ with 5 ♕xg4. Did Black miscalculate?

4...♘f3+!

Not at all; he had a second perpetual check in mind.

5 gxf3 ♕xf2+ 6 ♔h3 ♕f1+ ½-½

7.3

Yes, and a very good one!

52...♘h3+ 53 ♔g2 ♖f3!

Black threatens perpetual with ...♘f4+, ...♘h3+, etc., since ♔h1 would allow mate by ...♖f1#. In order to continue fighting, I sacrificed the knight:

54 ♘d2 ♖f2+ 55 ♔g3 ♖xd2 56 ♔xg4

However, Black managed to keep my pawns under control and got a deserved (for his inventiveness) draw.

8.1

White should either prepare c5 with 14 ♘b3 or start advancing the a-pawn.

14 c5?!

This premature move allows Black to open the position in the centre and get active play for his pieces:

14...c6 15 cxd6 ♕xd6 16 ♕b3 cxd5 17 exd5 ♘f5

and the strong knight on d4 annihilated White's strategic trumps.

8.2

White carelessly continued:

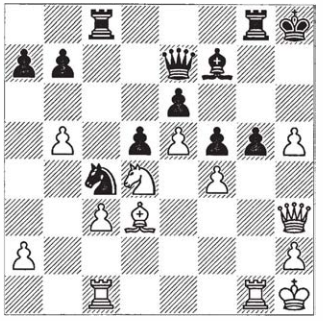
26 gxh5?

He was probably expecting to win quickly. Instead of this excusable mistake, he would have obtained a decisive advantage with 26 gxf5! exf5 (this horrible concession is recommended by Polugaevsky as the only playable move; 26...gxf5 leads to the position White was aiming for when he played 26 gxh5; he would then win with 27 ♘xf5! exf5 28 ♕xf5) and now, besides the obvious positional pluses, White wins an important pawn with 27 ♘xf5!; for instance, 27...♕e6 (Polugaevsky gives 27...♕d7 as a refutation of the sacrifice, but White wins with 28 ♕h4!) 28 ♖g3! intending ♗xc4 followed by ♘d6 and it appears that 28...gxf5 is not possible because of 29 ♗xf5 ♕e8 30 ♖xg8+ winning the rook on c8.

The cold shower came after:

26...g5!! *(D)*

W



Suddenly, it appears that the black king is completely safe under the cover of the white h5-pawn.

27 ♖ce1?!

In the line 27 fxg5 ♖xg5 28 ♖xg5 ♕xg5 29 ♖g1 ♕xh5 30 ♕xh5+ ♗xh5 Black manages to hold since 31 ♘xe6? loses to 31...♗f3+.

27...g4 28 ♕g3 ♘d2

Black is at least OK. Demoralized by the unexpected course of the game, White lost his control and dropped the full point rather quickly.

8.3

Not at all!

16...h5!

With this calm move, Black slows down the white attack for a while – just enough to create decisive threats on the other wing.

17 ♘g5

Not really saving the game, but it was of vital importance to place the e6-square under control. Black wins elegantly after 17 gxh5 ♗e6 18 a3 (or 18 b3 ♖xe3 with a material advantage and a decisive attack) 18...♖xa3!; or 17 ♗d3 ♗e6 18 b3 ♗xb3! 19 cxb3 ♖xb3+ with mate shortly to come.

17...♖xe3 18 gxf7+ ♖xf7 19 ♘xf7 ♕b4 20 ♘h6+ ♔h7 21 c4 ♘c3+ 22 ♔a1 ♕a4 0-1

10.1

22...♗xc5!

It is easy to ascertain that this is forced; the point behind it is to be found one move later.

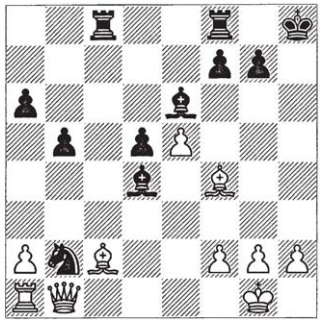
23 ♖xc3

When he played 22 ♘c5, Dolmatov relied on this pin, since after 23 dxc5 d4 Black's pawns would become threatening.

23...♗xd4!

We already know that threats against the queen, in particular pins, should not be overestimated. In exchange for his strongest (but temporarily passive) piece, Black eliminates two active white pieces as well as an important central pawn.

24 ♖xc8 ♖axc8 *(D)*


W

Black's position is already to be preferred: his pieces are much more active than White's.

25 a4

White should do something to get his rook into play. 25 a3 is too slow and allows Black to retain the initiative by 25...♖c4 with threats of ...♖fc8 and ...♗xf2+; for example: 26 ♖a2 ♖fc8 27 ♗b3 ♗xf2+ 28 ♔xf2 ♖xf4+ and White cannot get any advantage from attacking the rook, because an intermediate check on a defended square would follow, giving the knight time to reach a stable square.

25...bxa4

Yusupov mentions that he rejected 25...b4 because of 26 ♖a2.

26 ♖a2

White tries to take advantage of the unstable position of the knight. A direct attacking attempt starting with 26 ♖a3 ♖c4!? 27 ♗f5 fails to 27...♗xf2+ 28 ♔xf2 ♖xf4+ 29 ♖f3 ♖xf3+ (Yusupov) and the more advanced of the a-pawns is very dangerous.

26...♖c4!

Similarly to the game Nunn-Yusupov, this is an illustration of economy of force. Precise calculation was needed, as usual when employing this method: the consequences of the 28th move had to be foreseen.

27 ♗e3 ♗xe3 28 fxe3 a3 29 ♗b3

Taking the pawn with 29 ♖xa3 allows Black a strong attack: 29...♖fc8 30 ♕xb2 ♖xc2 31 ♕d4 ♖c1+ 32 ♔f2 ♖8c2+ 33 ♔f3 ♖f1+ 34 ♔g3 ♖c4! (Yusupov only gives 34...♖g1, which is not too bad either) 35 ♕a7 (the only safe square for the queen, in view of the possible discovered check on the 36th move) 35...♖g4+ 36 ♔h3 ♖g6+ 37 ♔h4 ♖xg2 with a mate coming soon.

29...♖b4 30 ♖xa3 ♘c4 31 ♖a4 ♖fb8 32 ♖xb4 ♖xb4 33 ♕a2 ♘xe3 34 h3

Preparing ♔f2.

34...♖e4 35 ♕xa6 ♖xe5 36 ♔f2 ♖e4 37 ♕c6 g6

With all his pieces in stable positions and a safer king, Black has better chances. However, the game ended in a draw.

11.1

25...♖e6! 26 a4

After 26 ♗xe6 fxe6 followed by ...♘e7-d5 White's extra exchange wouldn't make itself felt. All the lines are closed, the pawns lack mobility and Black has the strong threat of ...b4.

26...♘e7

Premature is 26...b4 27 d5 ♖xd5 28 ♗xe6 fxe6 29 ♕xc4.

27 ♗xe6 fxe6 28 ♕f1

It is important for White to keep the c4-pawn under control, as can be seen from the line 28 ♕f2 ♘d5 29 ♖f3 b4.

28...♘d5 29 ♖f3 ♗d3 *(D)*

W

30 ♖xd3!

A well-timed decision. If White relied on his material advantage, Black would get a very promising position; for instance, 30 ♕f2 b4.

30...cxd3 31 ♕xd3 b4

Now, the missing pawn is compensated by the superiority of the knight over the bishop. It is White who should be careful.

32 cxb4

The white pawns are less mobile than they might look at first sight. Reshevsky understood perfectly that he couldn't afford to manifest activity; for instance: 32 c4 ♘b6 and now:

a) 33 ♖c1 ♘xa4 34 ♗a1 ♕c6 and although the position of both minor pieces is rather strange (for instance after White plays c5 neither of them can move), the black pawns are far more dangerous.

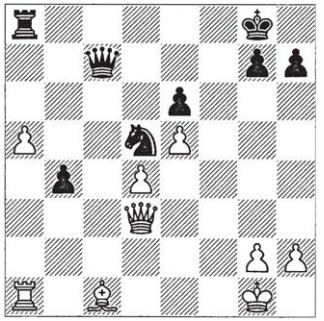
b) 33 d5 exd5 34 c5 ♘xa4 35 ♗d4 ♖c8 36 ♕f3 ♕e6 and it is Black again on the top.

32...axb4

The alternative is 32...♘xb4, when 33 ♕b3 ♘d5 gives Black excellent compensation. Petrosian preferred to keep a passed pawn. Less advisable for White is 33 ♕b5 ♕xb5 34 axb5 ♘d3 35 ♖e2 ♖b8 36 ♖d2, as recommended in several books, because of the simple 36...♘b4!.

33 a5 ♖a8 34 ♖a1 ♕c6 35 ♗c1 ♕c7 *(D)*

Even Petrosian understood that it would have been too optimistic to sacrifice the exchange again: after 35...♖xa5? 36 ♖xa5 ♕xc1+ 37 ♕f1 ♕e3+ 38 ♔h1 h6 39 ♖a8+ ♔h7 40 ♕b1+ g6 41 ♖a7+ ♔h8 42 h3! the black king is too exposed.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36 a6 ♕b6 37 ♗d2 b3 38 ♕c4 h6 39 h3 b2 40 ♖b1 ♔h8 41 ♗e1

At this moment, the game was adjourned and a draw was agreed without resumption. The players apparently thought that the extra pawn should keep trouble away from White.

½-½

11.2

31...♖f4! 32 ♗xf4

More prudent is 32 ♖xf4 exf4 33 ♗xf4 in order to fight for the dark squares, but, as Tal confesses, in those young years he considered that you always have to take the offered exchange.

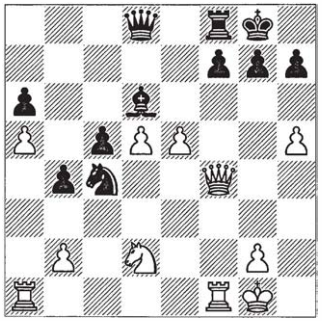
32...exf4 33 ♘d2

The knight hurries to defend the kingside, but again, 33 ♖xf4 deserves attention.

33...♘e5 34 ♕xf4 ♘xc4 35 e5 *(D)*

After a normal retreat of the queen, Tal was probably afraid of not being able to break down Black's blockade. Even so, giving a pawn back

B



is a risky decision, especially when the white king's position is weakened by the advance of the h-pawn.

35...♘xe5 36 ♘e4 h6 37 ♖ae1 ♗b8! 38 ♖d1 c4

The knight will now have a square typical for the Benoni: d3. The bishop will get new horizons too.

39 d6 ♘d3 40 ♕g4 ♗a7+ 41 ♔h1 f5 42 ♘f6+

After 42 ♖xf5 the weakness of the white king is obvious: 42...♖xf5 43 ♕xf5 ♕h4+ 44 ♕h3 ♕xe4.

42...♔h8!

Not, of course 42...♕xf6 43 ♕xc4+.

43 ♕xc4 ♘xb2 44 ♕xa6 ♘xd1 45 ♕xa7 ♕xd6 46 ♕d7 ♕xf6 47 ♕xd1 ♖b8!

Now Black has a material advantage, while White's weaknesses are still there. The game nevertheless ended in a draw after a long fight.

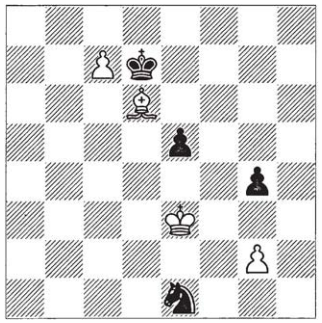
16.1

Not at all! He would have managed to set up a kingside fortress with:

58...♘e1! *(D)*

Lengyel probably limited himself to analysing 58...♘f4 59 g3 ♘d5+ 60 ♔e4 ♘f6+ when 61 ♔f5! wins both black pawns (61 ♔xe5? is mistaken because of 61...♘e8! and the bishop has to abandon the pawn).

W



59 g3

Black would hold a draw by tactical means after 59 ♔f2 ♘d3+ 60 ♔g3 e4! 61 ♔xg4 e3 62 ♔f3 ♘e1+ 63 ♔g3 e2 64 ♔f2 ♘xg2 with total simplification.

59...♘f3 60 ♔e4 ♔c8 61 ♗xe5 ♔d7 62 ♔f4 ♘h2!

The same construction as in the game Marin-Florean (see Chapter 5, Fortresses). White cannot win.

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